



RESTORING CONNECTIONS

transforming the world one relationship at a time

formerly the Center for Spirituality at Work



Making Choices participants at graduation

OUR COMMUNITY

The Restoring Connections Team was delighted to have many volunteers and community members join our two Community Caucuses, on June 15, 2020 and June 17, 2020. We would like to thank everyone who participated and shared ideas during these caucuses, and thank everyone for their continued active involvement in the organization. Check out our website to view the impact video we shared during these online events.

Since the previous newsletter, Restoring Connections has undergone several changes. We are thrilled to announce our new Executive Director, Maureen Upton, our new Board Chair, Martha Karnopp, and our new Operations Manager, Zoe Byers.

We are deeply grateful for the many years of service to the organization given by our previous Executive Director, Amanda Lopez, and to our previous Board Chair, Jan Williams. Jan will remain on our Board but without holding an Officer role for another year (see article on page 3).

Read on to learn more about our outstanding volunteers, our current activities, and how you can help us continue our mission during this unprecedented time.



INVENTIVE TO INFINITY

We find ourselves in liminal space, a time when what has previously worked and been accepted is no longer viable and what is coming is still unknown. It is a time of transition, but a transition without clear guidelines. While it is a threshold to something new, what we feel most painfully is the loss, the disorientation, the lack of control. The whole world is in a liminal space now due to the suffering caused by the pandemic. The U.S. and other places in the world are also in the liminal space of recognizing the depth of systemic racism and any assumptions that it does not involve us exposed as self-deception.



At Restoring Connections we are also in a liminal space with new staff and board members and the real challenge of staying faithful to our mission with social distancing requirements, a deep concern for our older volunteers and the prison being closed for health reasons.

The Vincentian ethos and strategy that has always guided all our programs is more important than ever. Vincent de Paul always focused on the importance of the mission and the difference between the mission and the structures and programs designed to carry out the mission. Structures are important—otherwise nothing gets done, but as circumstances change and as older structures no longer work, the mission is what guides the work. Guided by this understanding we are adapting our program approaches and the structures that support them. The mission, to unite diverse people for spiritual transformation and social justice, continues to guide us.

Vincent de Paul's belief that "love is inventive to infinity" is evident in ...

- Expansion of our mentoring work and supports for women in re-entry from prison and our broad networking with various communities of faith and other nonprofits
- Recruitment of new volunteers for our work with justice-involved women
- Movement of our Formation Program for Soul Care online as we welcome a new group of students
- Launching another year of Elder Wisdom programming focused on empowering seniors fifty-five and over to contribute to a more peaceful and just society
- Strategic work being carried out by our various volunteer committees encouraging even greater effectiveness in response to the needs of the most marginalized
- Commitment to racial healing by board, staff and volunteers through retraining, continued advocacy and an 8 week intensive program "Faith and Racial Healing" beginning in August

For further information about any of these programs see our website:

www.restoringconnections.org

OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the heart of Restoring Connections. Their talents and the generosity of their time has helped this organization continue to be effective in the community. This quarter we are recognizing three exceptional people.



Karen Gerdes helped to expand the services of Making Choices. In addition to mentoring women during incarceration, Karen assisted with interviews of program applicants, aided in the training of new Making Choices volunteers, served as a networking liaison to other nonprofits and helped to pilot the Making Choices re-entry program. She is moving out of state and we will miss her thoughtfulness, her guidance and her inspiring leadership. We are forever grateful for the guidance she brought to Making Choices.



Chris Aragon has been involved with Restoring Connections since 1996. He is a retired fire fighter. We got to know Chris when he attended our downtown Spirituality in the Workplace programs. He quickly became a part of the volunteer team, facilitating a workshop on spirituality and emotional healing. Chris is a graduate of our Formation Program for Spiritual Directors which ensures soul care for people who are homeless or in poverty. He served on the Board of Directors for six years. He continues to share his life experience and spiritual wisdom to people in the final third of life. As a volunteer information coordinator on the Elder Wisdom Team, Chris helps to ensure attendance at planning meetings. Humble and faithful, Chris brings a spirit of hospitality to all the programs offered by Elder Wisdom.



Jan Williams recently stepped down after four years as Chair of the Board Directors. Her discernment and people skills ensured stability for Restoring Connections during a significant passage including transition in Executive Directors, strategic planning for the future and an organizational name change as well as the new challenges created by Covid19. Jan is known for her warmth and for her servant leadership. She was the nonprofit founder of Inner City Health Center and she also served as the initial Executive Director for Joshua Station. The personal experience of guiding both those organizations made her an invaluable mentor for our founder, Vie Thorgren, as she stepped back from the Executive Director role. Restoring Connections Board and Staff have benefitted greatly from Jan's wisdom and we are so fortunate she has decided to continue on the Board of Directors for an additional year.

SOUL CARE MENTORING DURING RE-ENTRY

Staying at home during the pandemic getting you down, frustrated, anxious? The coronavirus quarantine and stay in place has affected everyone and has raised many questions. Have you considered this question: How do you stay in place when you have no place? We invite you to imagine yourself in the place of a woman in her 50s who is re-entering community after ten years of prison and trying to adjust to a pandemic.

Imagine walking beyond the razor wire of Denver Women's Correctional Facility as you are released on parole. It has been years since you have been outside of the prison walls. You board a Department of Corrections bus. You have a small box containing all of your belongings, \$100, an ID and your medications. Oh no, they must have forgotten to include your medications. What will you do?

On your first day on the outside, you must get to the apartment where you will be staying and also contact your parole officer. You will need a phone (\$30 at the grocery store) so that you can check in with parole regularly. You decide to get a bike, some clothes at a clothing bank, and some food. Next, you apply for Medicaid and schedule an appointment with a doctor. You have suffered with symptoms for more than a year. The prison clinic advised you to see a doctor after your release.

You soon discover that you will not be able to stay at the address that you registered with parole. So, you find a friend at a trailer park to stay with and notify your parole officer. A few days later, this friend who has mental health challenges, becomes violent, breaks your phone, throws away your bag of clothes and calls the police. Your usually reliable faith in God falters. Fear and panic set in so you call your Soul Care Mentor, a trained volunteer with Restoring Connections. You head to a shelter which is crowded, loud and chaotic. You encounter drug use and mental illness with no treatment available. Again, you advise your parole officer about where you will be staying at night.

Within a few weeks the governor announces the pandemic "stay in place" order. But, how can you stay in place if you don't have a place? Everything changes. The shelter is open but there are no supportive services. Churches, stores and nonprofits are closed. The recommended social distancing is impossible because of crowding at the shelter. Communication and transportation is difficult. You cannot attend church. The library is also closed, so there are no computers available. How can you get phone numbers of resources, like the Salvation Army, jobs and housing? So, you call your Soul Care Mentor for assistance.

A week later, you find a part time job cleaning houses. During your clinic appointment surgery is advised. No problem, you have Medicaid. When you are discharged from the hospital you are advised to rest in place for 10 weeks, no work and no biking, no lifting. How do you rest if you have no place? The shelter feels very unsafe. How can you succeed in the community and out of prison if you have no place? Frustration, loneliness and sadness set in. Your Soul Care Mentor becomes a lifeline.

Women in re-entry face significant challenges. In the midst of heavy supervision, bewildering demands, housing and food insecurity, their volunteer Soul Care Mentors help them deal with the daily trauma and to sort out their options. The recent pandemic makes the hurdles even higher. Please keep the justice-involved women we serve and our re-entry mentors in your prayers. And know that your financial support goes a long way.

HOW YOU CAN HELP



- 1. Have you heard about ReFund CO?**
It allows you to donate some or all of your state income tax refund to Restoring Connections. It's simple. Look for the "Donate to a Colorado Nonprofit" prompt when you file your state income tax.

Enter "Center for Spirituality at Work" and our registration number - 2002300771. Your gift will directly support our programs.

Visit www.refundwhatmatters.org for more information.



- 2. Please consider supporting us while you shop at King Soopers.**
Login at www.kingsoopers.com, search for The Vincentian Center for Spirituality and Work by name or enter CV216 and click Enroll. New users will need to create an account which requires basic information, a valid email address, and a loyalty card.



- 3. You can also support us while you shop on Amazon.**
Go to smile.amazon.com and select the Vincentian Center for Spirituality and Work as your charity. Bookmark smile.amazon.com and continue to make purchases as you normally would.

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