

REACHING OUT FROM WITHIN

Dear Friends:

The Blue Book has been a phenomenal resource for Reaching Out From Within! Conceptualized by Greg Musselman and Lisa Dunn 35 years ago it has stood the test of time and continues to be an extraordinary instrument for our members.

A conversation with a member in Hutchinson has stayed in my head and my heart. He reported to me that after every ROFW meeting, he would call his fiancée and the two of them would cover the topic that had just been discussed - with each other! He said their conversations were extraordinary and added a wonderful dimension to their relationship. Could the same benefit work with parents, husbands, wives, children and/or siblings?

So often, at meetings, I have heard people say: "When we do our time, our families are doing time, too." How could we use the Blue Book to engage families in their own discussions, or at least to better understand the emotional transformations that ROFW members are making?

Please give this idea some thought! Whenever I return from our exciting holiday celebrations, I am always amazed at the creative thinking of our members. Each group has its own way of honoring individuals and recognizing the unique spirit of each ROFW program.

Would you be interested in taking on the concept of engaging family members in this healing work that takes place every week? Could it be helpful in the re-entry transition? How could it work? In the next issue we will publish your responses to this proposal.

I look forward to this next possible step in the Reaching Out From Within journey.

Warmly,
SuEllen

An Olympic Dream: Block Olympics

As I write this article, the Olympic Games are being held in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Due to the nearly constant TV coverage, many of you may be watching winter sports that you are not too familiar with like curling (this has nothing to do with weights), the skeleton (this is not an event where athletes name bones in the body), ice dancing (this IS dancing on ice – with skates on) or the biathlon (anyone know which two events are part of this race?). The events at the summer games are probably much more familiar to most of us. And yet every four years, we sit in front of our TV's and see winter "sports" we may never have known existed. It's a good thing the Summer Olympics are only two years away.

Some people say the purpose of the Olympic Games is to showcase the best athletes in the world and to prove which person is the "best" at their sport. Others argue the Olympic spirit includes great athletes, but the true focus is on overcoming challenges or seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve more than what might normally be possible. Still others suggest the Olympics is a time for the people of the world to put aside their differences and come together in harmony. Each Olympic Games has showcased examples of all of these principles. I enjoy the idea and the purpose of the Olympic Games.

In another state, once a year, every correctional facility has a day that is designated "Yard Day". It is an institutional "holiday" where everyone is off work. There is a special lunch meal that is bigger and better than any regular meal and this is the ONE meal all year that can be taken from the chow hall and eaten in your block, in the gym or even outside on the yard. It is the one day of the year that no one has to wear state uniforms. The staff serves free popcorn and snow cones to the residents and some places even have an ice cream truck or other food trucks on the premises. (These items are ordered and purchased ahead of time with personal funds and tickets are passed out on Yard Day to exchange for the food.) It is a day to relax and get away from the day to day routine of prison. All of this would be great by itself, but the real draw to Yard Day was the Block Olympics.

The week or two leading up to Yard Day, were filled with sports contests where people from each block/pod form teams to compete against the other blocks/pods. Sports included: softball, basketball, volleyball, handball, weight lifting events, track & field events, and even chess or scrabble tournaments. Many of the event finals were held at various times on Yard Day. The list of potential Olympic events is almost limitless. The idea was to find something that anyone could participate/compete in if they so desired.

COURAGE TO CHANGE

Block Olympics: Continued

Points were awarded for those who did well: 10 points for 1st; 7 points for 2nd; 5 points for 3rd; 3 points for 4th; and 1 point was given if someone from the block/pod simply PARTICIPATED in the event. (Sometimes the participation points decided the eventual winner.) A scoreboard was created with each of the events across the top and each of the blocks/pods listed down the side where winners from each event could be scored and a running point total for each block/pod could be calculated. At the end of the Block Olympics, the block/pod with the most points was called to eat first for a whole month. Individual winners were given a special meal or pop or some award (paid for by the inside groups that sponsored the Olympics). Even within the correctional facility, there was a noticeable Olympic spirit that prevailed.

It never ceased to amaze me at how transformative Yard Day was. No one wanted to miss out on Yard Day, so in the weeks leading up to the Olympics, behavior issues at the facility improved, fewer tickets were written for rules infractions and the harmony and unity in the blocks/pods increased as people worked together prepare their teams for the Yard Day events. Despite the odds, as Yard Day grew near, the Olympic Spirit prevailed within the hearts and minds of the residents and staff at the facility. Too bad Yard Day was only for one day and the Block Olympics had to end.

I wonder if Reaching Out From Within could sponsor a Block Olympics at each facility? The Olympics ideology fits nicely with the ROFW Beliefs. Our Goals and Beliefs is found on page ii of the BlueBook:

We Believe:

- that no one has the right to hit anyone (advocate for a peaceful Olympics);
- in using alternatives (sports/friendly competition) to cope with stress and anger;
- in advocating a violence-free lifestyle (finding alternatives to violence through sports/competition/comradery);
- that, even though we are incarcerated, we can help those in need (providing a day of peace, unity and harmony for residents and staff);
- in the importance of caring for humanity (allowing the Olympic spirit to prevail within the facility – the spirit of hope, possibilities and promise).

Implementing this idea would take a concerted effort among the ROFW groups to propose such an activity. It might need to start at one facility, where ROFW has the membership, the relationship with staff, the reputation on the compound and the insight to implement the Block Olympics (as a future model to other facilities). Some facilities may not allow such an event just as some ROFW groups are allowed to raise funds while other ROFW groups are not allowed. But what would it look like if, one day, every KDOC facility had a Block Olympics sponsored by Reaching Out From Within?

How could a Yard Day event, fostered by an Olympic spirit among the participants and rooted in Reaching Out From Within beliefs, transform each facility? This is one of my Olympic dreams. What's yours?

Gregory Winship, M.A.
ROFW President and Acting Executive Director

Inside & Out

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SUBMISSIONS

Want to share an article, story, poem, or group update? Please do!

Newsletters are bi-monthly. Newsletters for 2018 will be published in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

The next issue will be May. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please submit to greg.rofw@gmail.com for consideration by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

February 14, 2018

Our journey is as long as we want it to be, it stops when "we" stop. So know it is okay to be content with where you are; you can stop progressing at anytime. Though the question is: is this far enough or do I want to keep going? -CP-

Today, I find myself asking these questions, is this far enough to mark my limits of progression in my life or do I want to push harder, making another run a surpassing my limits of right now – the place where I sit writing you this letter?

I understand that my life is not, by far, the image I projected in my younger years – to be 24 years old in prison, facing life wondering how much life I actually have left in me. I have kept the faith or should I say re-found it, the key to my being, right where I left is all those years ago...inside myself.

You see, we are so caught up living in another man's skepticism that we often times lose sight of our own outlooks on life. I admit, I had lost faith for humanity and realized that losing faith for them would also mean I would have lost faith in myself.

Let me explain:

In that statement it told me that I lost faith in myself because I vowed to change the world some how, some way, even in the harshest of circumstances – homeless, in poverty, or even being behind bars. I made this vow as a kid because it was hard and needed.

Who would've known I'd be put in position to want to take this vow seriously? A vow made by a child who held tremendous faith in himself; who believed he could do so. So to have lost faith in humanity is to say there is no one brave enough to attempt to make a single ripple in an ocean full of water, so I'll end with my decision.

I challenge you to make the choice to aim your aggressions at the path of progression. Every object that stands in front of us is an obstacle meant to be overcome by us. I encourage you to push forward in all that you do, no matter how enormous or tiny, any step forward is progression in the right direction.

We are not limited to our past judgments and actions. It's the actions of today that defines our tomorrow. Know in your mind and heart you are not doing this alone even if you are alone. This is the start of our journey together and it continues as long as one of us remains moving.

So to all, wherever you are, "NEVER GIVE UP" on me because I will never give up on you!!! Have faith.

WiseWords –CP-

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Friends,

I recently happened upon this mini-essay by Dr. Karl Menninger, who, at the time, was America's best-known, most-respected psychiatrist. I think it's worth sharing with ROFW members and volunteers.

Dr. Karl was one of my most influential mentors. He and SuEllen Fried were dear friends.

Dave Ranney, member
ROFW Board of Directors

**"Say you're sorry, say
you're sorry."**

A five-year-old girl stood in her crib in a ward of the Neurological Institute, erect, motionless, and mute. A few weeks prior to her admission, she had suddenly become strange, refusing to answer to her name, refusing to eat, refusing to remain in bed. She would wrap herself in a dirty blanket and turn her face to the wall, wetting and soiling herself.

One of the nurses remembered that upon one occasion she thought she heard the child say in a singsong rhythm, "Say you're sorry, say you're sorry."

On this clue, a doctor took the child's hand and said to her seriously, "I am sorry, I am very sorry." Upon this she turned slowly to other doctors and said, "Say you're sorry." And each of them did.

Then she began to talk. A week later she was acting like other children again. (although she continued to have psychotherapy for two years.)

One wonders how frequently another person's life would be changed this miraculously if they could be told in the right way at the right time by some of the rest of us that we are sorry!

Well, we are, aren't we?

Karl Menninger, 1973

Group Updates

Hutchinson South Unit (minimum)

INSIDE&OUT
March 2018

Jan. 5, 2018

Greetings from the R.O.F.W. group at H.C.F. – South Unit. We just had our Annual Banquet here. In attendance was Ms. SuEllen and friends, also our new President Greg and our great sponsor Ms. Alice and our newest sponsor Ms. Jennifer (who used to be at Lansing Minimum Unit).

Also, Ms. Alice brought along with her to our banquet her pastor from her church who is also thinking about joining our group as a sponsor. She also brought her son and several members from her church.

In attendance was the Incarcerated Veteran Board Member from the South Unit and Passageway Group member who helped the veteran when getting out of prison with housing, clothing, etc.

For our banquet menu we had country fried steak, beef brisket, mashed potatoes, corn, green beans with banana and coconut cream pies for dessert. Our group has grown with 4 new members - 2 giving Icebreakers already.

South Unit Board Members

Chairman: Aaron Johnston
Co-Chairman: Jamie Moon
Secretary: John Bruce
Sponsors: Ms. Alice and Ms. Jennifer

Treasurer: Marquas Blassingill
Librarian: Leonard Hannah
Newsletter Editor: Craig Pittman

Have a BLESSED MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR

Edited by Craig E. Pittman, H.C.F. – South Unit



Group Updates Oswego and ECF

INSIDE&OUT
March 2018

Every week at our ROFW meeting as Oswego we recite, "We believe, that even though we are incarcerated, we can help those in need." It's easy to think it means our organization can help the needy, or, when we get out we can help those in need. But, sometimes there is someone around you that could use your help now.

One of the hardest things to deal with while incarcerated is the death of a loved one. When that loss occurs to your cell-mate, a co-worker or friend, there are some things you can do to help him deal with his grief. For starters, lose the clichés. Phrases like, "I understand how it feels", or "It will pass", do not soften the grief and only offer false relief. Instead, listen to him. Console him with your presence and concern. Grieving takes time, sometimes even years. Be patient with your grieving friend. Never tell him to move on before he is ready.

As tough as it sounds, talking through pain helps alleviate the hurt. The nonprofit organization Mental Health American says we should encourage others to reminisce special memories of the deceased. Ask a few questions. Inquire what characteristic about the deceased did he find most compelling? Ask for a funny story involving the deceased, etc. Laughing about the good ol' days is the healthiest medicine during the grieving process.

While the property we can have is limited, suggest he ask his family to send in something that belonged to the loved one. A photograph they owned and had touched could help; if the photo is of a common memory that is even better. Exercise also combats grief. It provides a positive, often needed, retreat. Schedule workouts (even just walks) in advance with your friend, and make sure he writes it on his calendar. What's more, exercise can help relieve stress. Harvard Medical School reported, "Persistently elevated levels of stress hormones can reduce immunity, raise blood pressure and cholesterol and induce abnormal heart rhythms".

Your friend needs your support to lift his spirits and overcome his loss. Ask only enough questions to get him to talk about his loved one. He doesn't want a Dr. Phil. Understand the emotions of grief: sadness, shock, anger, denial and despair. The process can go quickly or take a long time. Don't push him, just let him know you are there for him.

It's very possible you may feel that your intervention didn't help. Don't expect too much. Just be a friend at a time when a friend is needed.

ROFW Oswego
D. Morris

Hello fellow members,

Once again, greetings from the Ellsworth chapter. The New Year seems to be flying by and we're all excited to put new thoughts and ideas about how to make our group better into action, but sometimes we forget that the best action is just showing up to the group and listening.

Recently we had a member share with us his experience of spending thirteen years straight in solitary confinement. He expressed that the mental and emotional rigors were too much for a lot of the people who shared his experience and that the long-term isolation had a tendency to damage the way people interact in social groups once they're back in population. He expressed that ROFW gave him a place where he could interact comfortably with positive people and regain some of the people skills that had dulled over the period of his isolation.

So, with all of the grand ideas that we have to expand the program, let us not forget that sometimes the best medicine for what ails us is just sitting in a room with some positive people sharing our experiences. That's where the real power of ROFW lies.

Until next time...
Ellsworth Correctional Facility

Group Updates

Winfield

INSIDE&OUT
March 2018

Hello from down south.

Sorry for the delay in submitting newsletter contributions. We held our yearly elections in January and a lot of positions have changed and quite a few have stayed the same.

With the New Year has come the second half of the school year and more speaking engagements. The most recent were in February and students from Goddard came and were given tours and heard from new members who had recently completed the speakers workshop. The speakers were: Kenny Luna, Jacob Rank, Michael Page, and former speakers Mark Alvis, Timothy Ledesma and William Downs. The new speakers did a wonderful job for it being the first time in front of the students. Many questions were asked and given great answers.

Our next speaking engagement is in March with Winfield H.S. returning for two days. Our hopes are that one of our stories will touch the lives of at least one student and keep them from making the choices that we have made and becoming offenders in the K.D.O.C.

COURAGE TO CHANGE

In recent months I have had family members and many friends ask me, "What has happened to you? You do not seem like the same person we have known". So I would like to share with you what I have shared many times with them.

When I arrived in Winfield to start my pre-release program I was approached by another inmate in class. He asked me if I had ever been to R.O.F.W? I told him I had been to SVC back in 1995 but only went a few times but really liked it. He told me that there was a need for people that could go on speaking engagements. I told him that I would check it out.

The following Tuesday, I went and despite the stigma that goes with R.O.F.W. I felt right at home. That night was a Blue Book night so I started looking through the pages and I opened a page with a picture of a former member, Chuck Thach (rip), and it brought tears to my eyes. I had not thought of Chuck in years. I was asked what was wrong? I replied nothing and finished by saying, "The man in this picture made a huge impact in my life and all I have ever wanted was to do the same". Even now as I write this I stopped to look at that picture.

So from that moment on I have found where I belong. After that, I completed the speakers workshop and was able to attend my first speaking engagement at Wichita High School East. At around 8:00 a.m. on September 26, 2017, I found my "Courage to Change".

It was the first time that I have shared my story with strangers, and for the first time I saw who I really was and I did not like that person at all. And now with my continuous work and the support of my friends in Reaching out From Within I can finally look in the mirror and like who I see.

Plus it did help that at our banquet a true lady named SuEllen Fried hugged me and held me by my cheeks and looked into my eyes and said, "You will do great things". No person, let alone a total stranger has had faith in me.

So I have made the change and encourage everyone that I meet to find their "COURAGE TO CHANGE".

Thanks so much ROFW,

William J. Downs