

# REACHING OUT *from Within*

## Making Good on His Second Chance

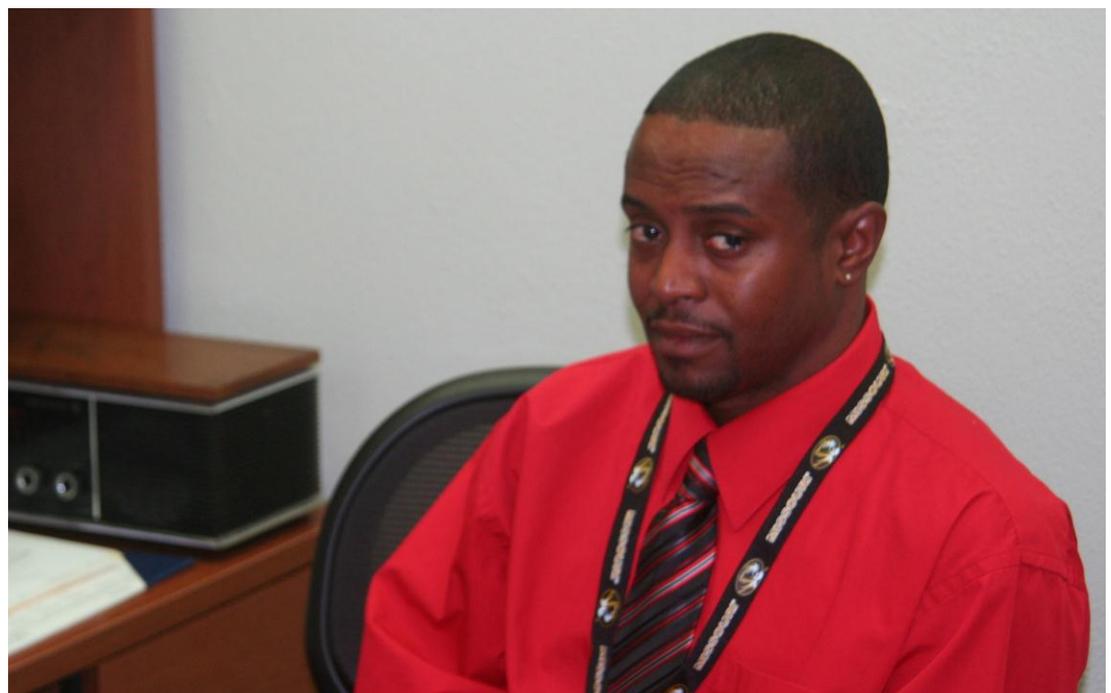
**ROFW alumnus Andre Carson** is making the most of his second chance by helping others with their second chance. Carson was convicted of felonies in three counties at age 17 and served 15 years in Missouri and Kansas prisons before being paroled in 2002.

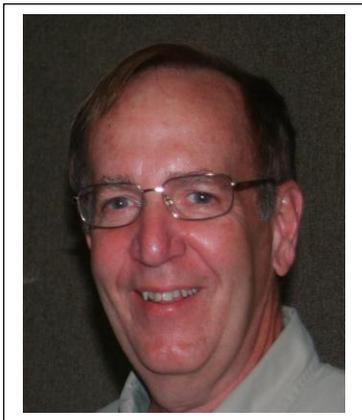
Today he is the Reentry Client Advocate with the Jackson County Prosecutor’s Office. In that capacity, he helps men in Missouri prisons navigate the re-entry process. It’s a newly created position that he feels well-suited for. I spoke with him recently about his experiences.

Carson, 41, is married with two daughters and is midway through a Master’s in Social Work program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. But he still remembers how bitter he was when incarcerated in 1989 and the effort it took to change his life. *(See Second Chance, Page 3)*

“I grew up in prison”

Andre Carson  
in his office  
in Downtown  
Kansas City,  
Mo.





### Message From President Russ Thompson

**At the December Recognition Banquets** we began the practice of presenting attendance certificates for two groups: those who have attended over 50 meetings and those who have attended over 100 meetings. These awards were based on the attendance records submitted by the groups to Ms. Tana Field, a volunteer who kindly inputs the attendance data submitted into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for our records and for use in research supporting the effectiveness of our program. Group reporting on attendance significantly improved last year and we were able to give out 67 certificates. Lansing Max got the most with 12, followed by Larned West with 10. Lansing Medium had the most Century Club members with 6, followed by El Dorado and Winfield with 4 each.

We will be awarding certificates again in December 2012. It is critical that we have group attendance data in order to award them properly. Some groups opt to submit their data at the end of each month. We would like to have the data at least quarterly. Data should be mailed to Ms. Tana Field, 6115 El Monte Street, Fairway, KS 66205. Make sure the group name is at the top of each attendance record submitted.

Beginning this issue, we are reporting the month of the last attendance record received. The report follows:

LCF-Max	Mar. 2012	EDCF	Jan. 2012
LCF-Med	Mar. 2012	HCF-East	Mar. 2012
LCF-Min	Mar. 2012	HCF-Cen.	Nov. 2011
TCF- Med/Max	Nov. 2011	HCF-Sou.	July 2011
TCF-Min	May 2011	NCF-Med	Mar. 2012
TCF-Tues Grp.	None	NCF-Min	Mar. 2012
WCF	Feb. 2012		

## 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Calendar

The following dates were selected for special anniversary events by ROFW groups. Open dates in September are still available for scheduling.

- Sept. 1:** LCF-Minimum (East Unit)
- Sept. 6:** LMHCF-West Unit
- Sept. 8:** LCF-Medium
- Sept. 10:** TCF- Medium/Maximum
- Sept. 11:** TCF-Tuesday Group (day 1)
- Sept. 12:** TCF-Tuesday Group (day 2)
- Sept. 15:** HCF-Medium
- Sept. 17:** LCF-Maximum
- Sept. 18:** NCF-Medium
- Sept. 20:** LMHCF-Central Unit
- Sept. 22:** SuEllen Fried's Birthday event, Kansas City area
- Sept. 24:** TCF-Minimum
- Sept. 26:** HCF-Maximum
- Sept. 29:** Alumni/volunteer event, Kansas City area
- Nov. 15:** Gala Celebration, Sheraton Hotel, Overland Pk.

### ROFW Alumnus speaks to K.C. Re-entry Coalition

**A**lumnus Stephan Smallwood was guest speaker at the March meeting of the Greater Kansas City Re-entry Coalition.

Smallwood is one of the first ROFW mentees to enter the community. Though he only released from LCF three weeks earlier, he had already secured housing and a job. He and his mentor worked hard to smooth reentry, including getting a Social Security card for employment, building his wardrobe, and getting a bus pass. The two meet frequently.

He described his experience with ROFW and his determination to overcome addiction. Coalition members left with an inspiring message and a better understanding of ROFW and its new mentoring program.

(Continued from Page 1)

# Second Chance

He felt that the system had locked him up and thrown away the key. He describes that 17 year-old as “angry” and “volatile.” Five years passed in prison before he decided he needed to make some personal changes.

“It’s a good thing I did not get a short sentence,” he confides, because he believes he might have gone back to the gang life. But eventually he changed his attitude and began working to improve his life.

Carson sought out various self-help groups to develop life skills. At ROFW, he says, something seemed to click. He felt he had found a real home.

“I felt a commitment at the very first meeting,” he said. “There was a realness factor—the guys were there because they had found something meaningful.”

Public speaking had always been a challenge for Carson, but at ROFW he was able to develop confidence by speaking before the group. In all, he served four years as ROFW group chairman and grew in character and maturity.

He also got hooked on education while earning a GED. He took Community College courses in prison until he could no longer afford college because Pell Grants were withdrawn. He also enrolled in correspondence courses.

One strategy that served Carson well was to use his prison time to pick up job skills whenever the opportunity arose. At LCF-Medium, for example, he became certified as a forklift operator.

Later at LCF-Minimum, that job skill helped him get an off-site prison job at Henke

in Leavenworth, where he was able to put away some savings.

“I was always looking for job skills that would benefit me later,” he said.

After release from prison, Carson found work as a warehouseman and continued his education. He eventually earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management from Ottawa University. Not long after graduating, he was recruited out of the warehouse to help in the front office with accounting, and as they say, the rest is history.

Carson’s path through the prison system had its ups and downs, too, he says. It wasn’t all smooth sailing. Before making parole, he got rolled back to LCF-Maximum when it was discovered he kept a phone at Henke.

“I had got a little too comfortable and selfish,” he said.

As a ROFW alumnus, Carson began returning to LCF three years ago. Most recently, he was a featured presenter at a ROFW Summit in LCF-Medium. He is also active in the Greater Kansas City Re-entry Coalition.

In his new job, he carries a case load of 25 men and travels the state of Missouri to meet the clients he will follow in the community after release.

Paul Showalter, ROFW Exec. Dir.

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***“I felt a commitment at the very first meeting,” he said about ROFW. “There was a realness factor—the guys were there because they had found something meaningful.”***

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# News and Views from ROFW Groups

LMHCF-CENTRAL UNIT

## No One Owes You Anything

Face it, you're in prison, locked away from family and friends. You're in an environment where nobody owes you anything. You will receive the very basics as mandated by law. Three meals, lights, water, a bed roll and clothes to wear. Anything else is extra—phones, canteen, electronics, visits. But you learn to depend on the extras because you use them as an escape from the reality of confinement. And that's okay to a point. However, reality must be embraced.

So here's the question, What Do You Want? What goals and plans are you making in your mind as you pace your cell? What is it you want to achieve? What is it? Being the big boss man, a fast hustler? So you dream about it. Spending hours a day, saying the same things you have always said, having the same thoughts you have always had. The same thoughts that brought you into a world of incarceration.

You must realize you now live in a monastery. A place where you can get books to educate yourself. A place where you can prepare yourself for a real life in the free world. And in solitude you get to know yourself. And if you possess true self-awareness you can find your weaknesses and work them out. You can work towards betterment. You can get your GED, a trade. You can bring yourself up. So, What Do You Want?

Is it a good woman, kids, home, a real job? The fact is you get out of any endeavor what you put in to it from the very start. If you game and don't take it serious, you soon stagnate and end back up incarcerated. But if you take the time and make real efforts, it is then that you reap real rewards. You spend your time in this monastery wisely, educating yourself on free world concerns. You strive to become a real man, husband, father, home owner, employee. You train yourself in here to recognize hazards before they reach you. You learn to avoid the hassles and pitfalls so many fall to. So you don't end back up in here talking the same talk as every other prisoner who didn't make it in the free world. You're back because nobody would give you a job. You couldn't get a break. You're being held down. My P.O. was out to get me. And now you're back penny hustling, begging for a bar of soap and a stamp. But along the way you forgot a very important fact. Nobody owes you anything!

You have to work to get what you need and want. You earn it. How, you wonder? By spending your time in this monastery intelligently. You take the time now to prepare yourself—study! Bring yourself up. Don't expect someone else to pull you out of the mire. You're a man; stand up and move forward. You do it for yourself. Because no owes you anything.

Austin M., LCMHF Central program director

LCF-Maximum

## Being a true American from Within

As I sit in this prison cell, I think: How many think they've been done wrong? Well, hell, we're Americans; we have chosen—good or bad, it was our choice.

So naturally, where we are, what we have, what we are: it's all a part of who we are. How we act and treat others and their property: that's how we get back to where we are.

I love America—because of people and programs. Yes, people and programs. In America, there are people and programs that care about people like you and me.

I've been in one for over eight years. The people—civilians—in this program truly care, true Americans. You can get free in this program by the giving of yourself from within.

You can be like me right here in prison. Come on and join me and the rest of us in our program—Reaching Out From Within. Be a true American.

Old Noble J.

## 30 Years Old And Going Strong

**W**e are coming up on the 30<sup>th</sup> the Anniversary of ROFW, formerly known as Stop Violence. The program has changed over the years and evolved into the tremendously successful entity we know today. The largest hurdle is the test of time. The fact that we're still here is a testimony to the program's success.

The program works. That's a fact that cannot be disputed. The recidivism rate for participants versus non-participants is again a testimony to the program's viability and to the character of those who've made the choice to alter the course of their lives. These members would not have achieved the level of success they reached without the added support of the program.

### **Shared Fellowship is one of the keys**

The fellowship shared by members is the life blood of the program's continued success. The dictionary defines fellowship as "a group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim." Those who make a personal commitment to pursue change influence others whether they realize it or not. That's why member behavior outside the group is so imperative—our walk, not our talk, is ROFW's testimonial.

One of our members—a long-term drug addict—has made tremendous strides in his recovery over the last year. He has not only changed his behavior, but has altered his entire belief system. He is in a unique position to fully understand the addict's plight. He has vowed to use his own struggles with drugs as a way to reach out to other struggling addicts and help them see the light of recovery that shining through the haze of drugs.

We are proud of this person's personal growth. We are pleased with the role that ROFW has played in helping him accomplish his goal: to live a drug-free lifestyle. If each of us reaches out to one person, and that person to another person, we change their perception of the character and salvagability of those who've become addicted to drugs.

The only way to change the public perception of inmates is to change our personal view about ourselves. We committed a crime, which defines what we did. It does not define who we are. We can't always prevent the public from having a negative opinion of us, but we can prevent others from being right! That's within our control.

*(Continue on next page)*

### **Addiction takes many forms**

**W**hen people think of addiction, the first image they conjure up is drug addiction. But addiction is not limited to drugs.

People can be addicted to almost anything: obsessive collecting of things, food, alcohol, drugs, lying, sex, violence, money, even hatred. People who hate other people allow hatred to become their drug or choice. They spend their life feeding this craving, unaware or not caring about the destruction they are causing themselves and the damage they are doing to others.

Hatred is the most destructive emotional addiction on the planet. It is currently at epidemic proportions. It is currently at epidemic proportions. It's like a cancer that's eating away at America's character. The entire world is in desperate need of hatred intervention.

W.J.

If people leaving prison commit themselves to staying out, the recidivism rate will soon drop to the point where people will begin to take notice and realize that programs, such as ROFW, do work. The general public is willing to fund programs like ours, but they have to know that their money is well spent. That's where we come in. The public's opinion starts with us.

We wish our member dealing with drug addiction great success and hope his behavior will influence others to take personal inventory of their own beliefs and lifestyle. Our actions are like a pebble dropped into a pool of water. This pebble creates an ever-widening ripple that moves outward to touch the lives of everyone around us.

We have the opportunity and the responsibility to control the ripple we send out. We need to make our ripple a positive movement, not just another negative disturbance.

As Booker T. Washington said, "Success isn't measured by the position you reach in life; it's measured by the obstacles you overcome."

William Johnson, Chairman

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## LCF-Minimum (East Unit)

The men from Lansing's East Unit would like to give a shout out to all of our brothers and sisters all over the state.

We held our annual banquet in December with Shirley Miller from one of our charity organizations, Gracious Promise, in attendance. We presented her with over \$300 in donations from the men at Lansing Minimum. Our event was attended by 34 members and 10 guests. Thanks to everyone for a successful banquet.

We have enjoyed a strong beginning to our new year on "the Hill." We now have 5 sponsors for the group, with our newest addition Georgetta "George" Preston. She joins Sam Jones, Russ Thompson, Bonnie and Mickie Swade.

### 13 GED Graduates in Two Years

ROFW also sponsors the GED program at the East Unit. ROFW group members serve as tutors for those working toward their GED. A total of 13 men have earned their GED in the last two years.

Outside volunteer sponsors for the GED program are Judy Beiriger, Maggie McCoy, Lew Goetz, Martha LaVann and Maralee Thompson. We believe we have the strongest group of volunteers anywhere.

### Work on New Blue Book Unit on Grieving

Our group is finalizing a Blue Book unit on "grieving." We would like to extend a challenge to all of the other ROFW groups out there: Currently there is no unit in our Blue book on "parenting." Would someone step up to the challenge and develop a unit on parenting?

Our group sponsored a spades tourney and had 48 participants from the general population. What a great turnout! We gave out \$48.00 in prizes to the top 3 teams. We are now preparing for a dominoes tourney in March and expect an even bigger turnout.

We look forward to an exciting spring and preparing for our annual Summer Summit. I know that with our strong leadership and with our membership holding consistently at over 25, it will be a huge success.

Remember: our situations and the people around us don't dictate our character; they reveal it. Best wishes to all.

Clayton Nolan, Newsletter Editor

## Inside & Out

Published for the benefit of ROFW members by  
Reaching Out From Within

P.O. Box 8527

Prairie Village, KS 66208

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Next Submission Deadline

May 19, 2012