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Inmate News

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Grow
yourself a
Money Tree!

A quarterly publication that brings Inmates, their family & friends, and interested organizations into one place. Our goal is to give Inmates a voice in discussions about the issues that affect them, an opportunity to find out how others deal with the same issues, and to effect positive changes.

Barter or Contraband

When my youngest son was going through various juvenile systems, we had a few discussions about contraband and why he wasn't allowed to share or have certain things. I still don't really understand the details, except where illegal activities are concerned, but trading with other inmates seemed to be a problem. In the real world this is called bartering, but in criminal circles it can become extortion. There isn't an easy solution.

When inmates are out in the real world, they do "favors" for others and ask favors in return. This is bartering. We just don't keep a paper trail of our actions.

Contraband is defined, online, as "property that is unlawfully produced, possessed, or transported," (Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Law, 1996). In prison, this could be anything. I understand envelopes are a big source of problems in prisons and can become contraband because inmates lack money.

It seems to me that we can use the computer to resolve these issues and take the punishment out of things that are considered normal in the real world.

As I have searched for answers about this problem, I wondered how taxes would apply to inmate exchanges. The government, in its quest for more and more dollars, has decided that barter was a tool to avoid paying taxes. Now we are all suppose to keep good records of every "trade" we make in this life so we can pay our proper amount of taxes on the exchange. In tax terms, if a dentist trades a root canal for a contractor's remodel of his office, both the dentist and the contractor have to declare the benefit as income and pay taxes on it.

Does this mean an inmate trading a packet of oatmeal for a candy bar is barter? What about a greeting card for an envelope? A painting for a radio? Inmates are currently a separate category. How do we deal with these issues? Is everything contraband so we don't have to deal with the IRS? I have been trying to figure that out.

One solution is to register these trades, to set up a legal form of barter within the prison system. This doesn't resolve the tax issues, but it might start the process, and it could be included in the online sales process that needs to be brought into prison systems. If inmates are able to create income through sales, they will have money to pay their tax burden. That sounds great to me!

Inmate to Inmate

- **What do you know that can make life better for other inmates?**
- What is your solution to a real problem that inmates face?
- What advice or suggestion would you like to share with other inmates?

Send us your stories! Try to keep them short. If we print yours, we will send you a certificate for one year of Inmate News. When we are more established, we will create a cash benefit. We do reserve the right to edit them for spelling, grammar, clarity, and/or the space we have available.

The Editor's View

The end of each year is always a big deal for me. This is the time I review the past year and try to make decisions about my goals for the next year. With little money, trying to create goals is difficult. Usually, I think about what I would LIKE to happen, and start moving in that direction.

What is an achievable goal, or resolution, for 2011? For me, it might be keeping on schedule, or fighting through the distractions and getting my "To Do" list conquered. Saving more money is a good goal, and paying my debts off is another. How to deal with *both* saving for the future and paying off past debts is the real challenge. So is reading my Bible these days.

Restitution is a debt that many prisoners face after they are released. It can hurt every effort made to change one's life, but there is no other path to the future. **Restitution is a debt that prisoners incur because of their choice to commit a crime.** It is a devastating burden to people who only make minimum wage, or less, but it has to be dealt with. Personally, I think the infliction of both jail time and excessive restitution is too great a burden for anyone. It could be considered a double punishment.

Unfortunately, I am not able to evaluate this legal process yet. I do know what it means to be a mother who has tried desperately to reach a child in trouble, and I know what it means to want to live without the constant fear of drug addicts, and thieves, and violence, and abuse. Once a crime has been committed, neither the criminal nor the victim can ever be the same.

How do we find a solution that will be best for our society as a whole, not just a means of vengeance?

If someone gets lost in poverty or the drug culture as a young person, they miss out on all the positive lessons that a parent would normally teach their child. Prison isn't going to make this problem go away. Being jailed is a negative experience for most people. How can we create an environment in prison that allows inmates to change their future?

Restitution can become a vehicle of positive change if we focus on what is needed to allow inmates to pay this debt. Minimum wage jobs while IN prison, alternative income options like those available through the Internet or an onsite retail store, ongoing education opportunities that will

lead to better employment when released, and job skills that reflect the goals of the inmate rather than the State — these might help.

Using prison time to simulate real life would be more productive. Requiring the State to pay minimum wage to inmates who work will provide budgeting skills. Higher incomes will allow inmates to purchase supplies to create more income. Internet sales listings will give the State another source of income through listing fees. More income will allow inmates to provide for their daily needs, to financially help their families, and to pay debts that are

court ordered.

By living within the minimum wage restitution budget, more realistic plans can be made for release. Inmate savings can replace the poverty of prison release, which often leads to new crimes. The habits and economic benefits of work will be discovered by the inmate, marketable skills will replace a sense of inadequacy, and long-term future freedom will become a more accessible and desirable goal.

Focusing on the burden of restitution while still in prison will make it easier for inmates to build a new life when they are released. Even more important, forcing the government to pay inmates minimum wage will help to keep them from considering inmates a source of free labor and digressing into slave labor.

The purpose of prison is to protect society from the actions of the criminal, but it does no good to just let someone sit in a prison until their sentence is complete. We **MUST** help inmates to create a better future when they are released. **In some lives, prison is the ONLY time there is to provide the critical resources needed to change their future.**

Let's try to make this one of America's goals for 2011.

In Christ,
Deborah Martin

Ephesians 4:28 KJV
Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Proverbs 6:30-31 KJV
Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.

Dealing with Stress

Inmates aren't the only people who have to deal with stress. Every adult in the world, and too many children, deal with some form of stress, whether financial, social, sexual, employment, physical, educational, or personal. Christians face stress, Atheists face stress. The homeless and the wealthy all have to deal with different kinds of stress in their lives. The people who watch over us, like doctors, lawyers, policemen, government leaders, and teachers, battle with stress. We can't get away from it, it's a part of being alive.

There are several definitions associated with the word "stress" at dictionary.com (8 January 2011). Right now, we are interested in what it does to the body (emphases mine):

- ◇ a specific response by the body to a stimulus, as fear or pain, that **disturbs or interferes** with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism
- ◇ physical, mental, or emotional **strain or tension**
- ◇ a situation, occurrence, or factor **causing** this (stress)

The effects of stress on our bodies and our lives are not positive. They degrade our ability to function, make our bodies fall apart sooner, cause illness and disease to flourish, and inflict mayhem on our desire to succeed. Stress is something we have to overcome.

An article at helpguide.org¹ tells us that we can choose unhealthy ways to cope with the stress in our lives. Some of their examples are : Smoking, drinking, overeating, under eating, zoning out in front of a TV or com-

puter, sleeping too much, procrastinating, being too busy to avoid dealing with problems, using drugs or alcohol to "relax," withdrawing from loved ones, or blaming others and using violence or anger to lessen our stress levels.

Inmates are given a lot of anger management classes to try to deal with the unhealthy stress responses they choose, but other stress habits are neglected. Finding a way to deal with the stress of prison life is just as important as finding healthy stress responses in normal life.

The helpguide.org article offers six (6) main strategies for coping with stress. I have added a brief explanation of the strategy.

Avoid unnecessary stress : Know your limits.

Alter the situation : Handle it differently.

Adapt to the stressor : Change yourself.

Accept the things you cannot change : Let it go, move on.

Make time for fun and relaxation : Nurture yourself.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle : Love yourself.

These are all excellent strategies for making life better. In a prison environment, it's not always easy to find good coping habits for stress. You will have to find the ones that will fit into your situation. Some of the suggestions in this article are not achievable for inmates, but they may fit the needs of family members, or help to deal with life's problems when you are finally released. Remember these, or share them with someone you care about .

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Go for a walk. | Work in your garden. |
| Spend time in nature. | Get a massage. |
| Call a good friend. | Curl up with a good book. |
| Write in your journal. | Listen to music. |
| Take a long bath. | Watch a comedy. |
| Sweat it out with a good workout. | Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea. |
| Play with a pet. | |

Prayer, reading the Bible, or spending time in worship are also great ways to deal with difficult situations. God is always waiting to help us.

FREE RESOURCE

Send for your own free copy of the federal government's

CONSUMER ACTION HANDBOOK.

The 2010 issue is almost extinct, but you can receive this issue and also ask to be put on the list for the next issue. My copy says this one is current through the summer of 2011. The handbook offers you a wide variety of information on topics like cars, employment agencies, nutrition, housing, education, using the Internet, and how to handle disputes. It also offers a lot of consumer contact information for all 50 states. Send a request to this address:

Handbook
Federal Citizen Information Center
Pueblo CO 81009

¹ http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm

In the News

- ◇ **Computers are being used to catch test cheaters** by analyzing responses for sameness. An article in the NY Times by Trip Gabriel says that when the answers are the same, right or wrong, the chances of being copied are high. (Register Guard, December 28, 2010)
- ◇ From another Register Guard article (12/28/2010) about Baby Boomers heading into retirement: "[a man] was laid off last January from his \$100,000-a-year job as a sales executive for a turf company. And with savings of just \$5000, **he's on a budget for the first time.**"
- ◇ After 30 years in a Texas prison, a man sentenced to 75 years for rape and robbery was **declared innocent because of DNA evidence.** (AP article by Jeff Carlton in the Register Guard, 4 January 2011)
- ◇ On Thursday, 6 January 2011, the Constitution was read in the House of Representatives. Article author, David Goldstein of McClatchy Newspapers, said congressional historians stated that **it was the first time since it was ratified in 1788 that the Constitution had ever been read on the House floor.** It took 90 minutes. (Register Guard, 7 January 2011)
- ◇ People tend to overestimate their ability to resist temptations around them, thus undermining attempts to shed bad habits..." Loran Nordgren, on the effects of dopamine in the brain. (Register Guard, 4 January 2011, article by Loran Neergaard, Associated Press)

I was very amazed to read about the 61-year-old man who made so much money in one year that he could have paid off an entire home mortgage in two to five years if he'd wanted to, but then found himself with only \$5000 in savings and was forced to retire early and take reduced Social Security benefits in order to survive financially. At 58, retirement is looming for me and I am reading a lot more articles on that topic.

I have spent most of my adult life attached somehow to aid systems, whether through food stamps, missions, food distributions, emergency interventions, AFDC, job programs, and more. I can't imagine earning that much money and not being able to save most of it or pay off my biggest debts. According to my last paystub, my gross income for 2010 is about \$10,500 — and that's for an entire YEAR! My actual take-home pay is only about \$8500. That comes to about \$700/month.

Do I embrace poverty? No. But I don't think poverty is an excuse to commit crimes. I think we need to find honest ways to survive and thrive. I am trying to do that myself, and searching for ways to provide

MONEY

safety. Americans give more money to charitable causes than anywhere I have ever read about. I believe it is the Christian heritage of America that makes this giving possible. **If America is devastated economically, it will hurt more than just its own citizens.**

My experience with government aid systems tells me that putting the government in charge of everything is NOT a good idea, but that seems to be where some people want to take us. The people who make these decisions about poverty programs live at a different level than those who receive program funds. The health care debates include people making \$40,000/year who want government insurance. I don't think they realize what it means to be under the government's "umbrella."

As each new program is established, the need for higher taxes looms. This need leads to the government using its ability to force citizens into pathways that serve itself, not the common good. In a financial crisis, these services are lost and those who have come to expect them are left without alternatives. It is better to stay away from government dependence.

I have wrestled with the dilemmas of money for a long time. When my sons were growing up in a welfare household, the teen years were most difficult. I never thought about having to have a label to feel worthwhile when I was growing up, but now it's the emblem of human value. I am still trying to find a peace with the command not to love money, but to keep its purpose clear. Money is a tool, for good or for evil. How we use it will be an important element of our survival as individuals and as a nation.

1 Timothy 6:9-11 KJV
 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

decent jobs for others like me.
 In America we are blessed with a social service system that is essential to community

No contract cell phones are now available from Straight Talk, T-Mobile, Boost Mobile, AT&T, Tracfone, and Jitterbug. There are probably more to choose from, but those are the ones I have information on right now.

No contract phones may still be the least expensive option available to those who have little money. Grabbing the cheapest phone is not always the best decision. You want a phone that will last, or be flexible enough to upgrade in the future.

Keeping the same phone number is also important. When you are job hunting, you want to have a phone reference that can be accessed for a long time. Some businesses keep their applications for 30 days, others for a longer time. If they like you, but just can't hire you now, a potential employer may keep your resume or application for much longer. There are some very skilled people who have been out of work for a long time in this financial crisis. A stable phone number is critical for future employment options.

If you have family members that can take messages for you, that's a good start, but you will need to have your own phone as soon as possible. Cell phones are about all that people want to have now, because you can carry it in your pocket. Cell phone coverage is getting better every year, and phone plans are expanding.

Phone plans with a two-year contract offer great phones at really low prices, but you have to make sure you can keep your commitment and pay their bills. Most phone companies don't advertise the real cost of having a phone service. Taxes can add \$15 or more to your bill. If you go over your plan's call limits, you will be charged extra money to cover

those costs.

Pay-as-you-go plans also have these charges, but you can't go over your budget. You have to add time to access your no contract phone number. This can become more costly than an unlimited calling plan in the long

run. It's a factor you have to think about in your phone decisions.

Jitterbug is a phone only option with 100 minutes a month for about \$20. You have to buy the phone to get the monthly rate, and there is a \$35 set-up fee in the fine print.

LINK-UP AMERICA is a phone assistance plan that helps to pay up to half of the *connection charges* for residential services, up to \$30 maximum. I think the residential services means a landline phone, not a cell phone. You will have to check on that.

In Oregon you can also get up to \$13.50 off your *monthly* phone bill if you receive food stamps through the OTAP program. I assume other states will have similar programs.

I think Tracfone was the first low-cost alternative in pay-as-you-go plans. They made a lot of money and now there is a lot of competition in the marketplace. Tracfone currently has monthly Value Plans from \$10 to \$30 for 50 to 200 minutes of phone time. You have to buy the phone, and read the fine print for the details. One of the phones they offer



What Will It Cost You ?

online has a nice look and several capabilities for about \$50.

Every phone option has different pricing structures. You can choose from unlimited calling, text messaging, voicemail, call

waiting, internet access, photo and video messaging,

and Bluetooth capabilities, just to name some of the options available now. International calling is growing in possibilities along with the Internet.

I had a Cricket account at one point, but switched back to a landline phone so my son could call me from prison. They had the only unlimited calling option at the time. I decided to spend more on a phone that had options I wanted to access in the future. Eventually, I passed the phone to my other son when he was newly released.

I may go back to Cricket again. It seems to be a reasonable plan, but it does have its own problems. There are no perfect solutions. :-)

If you receive a newspaper from some source, keep checking the ads and reading the fine print. By the time you are released, you will have a better idea about what phone you want and how much it will take to get one...and keep it going.

A lot of people are making phone calls over the internet now...I hope to try that one of these days!

Income Options

Minimum wage is about all an inmate can gather at release, if they can find a job, but it can lead to a much better future if you can keep your goals straight and not get disheartened. Families are much better when they are together, drug-free, and all trying to make a better future.

Saving money with coupons lets you get more of something with the same amount of cash or food stamps. Coupons for **buy one/get one free** allow you to save money. **Double coupons** for manufacturers coupons give you a bigger discount. And a **FREE coupon** is the ultimate savings because you

don't have to spend any of your hard earned cash to get it! These savings options are very important to the low-income budget.

I have been trying to keep track of what I save when I shop, but all the receipts I get don't reflect how much I save. When I shop at Wal-Mart or WINCO, the

savings are in the low price I get. But when I shop at places with a store discount card, like Safeway or Albertson's, there is usually a place on the receipt that tells me how much less I paid than non-card shoppers. Sometimes I take the time to figure out my savings at stores that don't include this information on their receipts, but I don't do that often.

My monthly savings usually is in the one hundred dollar range, but that includes a \$13.50 discount on my phone service as part of Oregon's OTAP program. As long as I receive food stamps, I am eligible for this discount. I have to remember that it will go away when my food stamps go away.

By saving money at the grocery store I am able to buy more groceries each month. That is important. I may only feed one, but I work hard at saving shopping money so I can get as much food as possible.

I use to think the old saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned," was funny — until I needed every penny I could get my hands on. It is hard to save money, and when you do save a penny, you HAVE earned it!

I am able to save more by getting the local newspaper and watching all the store sales. I can compare prices, decide where to shop, and remember that something I want is at a certain store if I am near it as I go about my daily business. I save more than the cost of the newspaper, and the paper helps me to keep up with what is going on in the world and my city.

When I was homeless in Portland I met a man that told me: "Always have something left at the end of the month." All I had was food stamps at that time, so I started trying to have some food stamps left at the end of the month. It was a real challenge, but I was able to achieve that goal.

I don't know if I could have done that with a family to take care of, but it would be just as important to do even if it wasn't just me. By trying to keep from spending money as long as possible, you begin to change the priority list you operate with. Eventually, you see that buying a car, a home, a vacation is possible if you budget and save your money.

Saving money also allows you to take advantage of better sales when they come up. Years ago I use to have a friend that was able to do that. I was always jealous of her for that. It's been a goal of mine ever since. Make it your goal, too.

VALENTINE'S DAY

is coming soon! Tell us how much you love your family, your mate, your friend. We may put some of your comments up on the website for February 14th. Keep it clean and under 214 words, please.



Restitution Reality

Understanding the reality of paying restitution is critical to surviving life after you are released. Most inmates are blessed if they find a job earning minimum-wage. In Oregon, 2011, that is \$8.50 per hour, or approximately \$1200 a month in net wages (after deductions), when you work full-time. The national minimum wage is only \$7.25 per hour, and that is about \$1000 net income per month.

Restitution, in Oregon, allows you to keep 75% of your net wages or a **minimum amount of \$942.50 per month**. If you earn less than this, in Oregon, you don't make a payment toward your debt/s. But if you owe child support, the government can take more of your checks. You will have to live on what you are allowed to keep.

Lane County, in Oregon, also struggling for financial resources, charges parolees a monthly fee to help offset their administrative costs. These fees, like child support, may not have a garnishment protection. You will have to find out if your home county has additional monthly fees that you have to plan for.

With the price of housing today, even \$1000 a month is not much money. **It means you will have to be very careful with your income and search for every possible savings** or benefit you can get your hands on, including housing options.

Living at home, sharing an apartment, or living in a much smaller apartment than you would like to, are all decisions you will have to face upon release.

If you get food stamps, that will help a little, but the amount of food stamps you get will be determined by your wages. The maximum amount for a single person in Oregon is \$200 per month. A box of macaroni and cheese can cost over a dollar. Creating a healthy diet that

The Secret to Happiness...

- Something to do;
- Something to love;
- Something to hope for.

Source unknown

will allow you the strength needed to meet your job duties, to work without getting seasonal colds and flu, to avoid paying for costly over-the-counter medicines, means fruits, vegetables, protein sources, whole grains, and dairy. You will have to find the best food bargains to make your limited funds stretch to meet your needs.

Food boxes are an option, and community meals are another way to extend your finances.

Food stamp recipients are eligible for government phone assistance, which is up to \$30 for connection charges and \$13.50 per month toward ongoing phone expenses. Your telephone expenses will still be around \$50 each month, even with these benefits.

Energy assistance might help you pay for your heat bills in winter. This one

expense can really destroy your budget. You have to pay your rent first, and struggle without heat if your income doesn't meet your expenses. If your source of heat is the same as your hot water, you may face difficulties with showers, laundry, and washing dishes. Paying ahead in the summer months can help pay the higher costs of winter heating.

If you understand the needs of your budget, how to protect your efforts from debt collections, and where to get help, it may keep you from reoffending and ending up back in prison. Starting this budget process before you are released will improve your chances of succeeding.

Getting into a tight place financially can tempt you back into crime. If you turn to drugs and alcohol to solve your problems, you won't have the ability to think rationally and make a better choice to solve your problems. It is very important that you plan ahead and understand the realities of your situation.

CAN YOU FILL THIS 3" X 3" SPACE WITH A BLACK AND WHITE ORIGINAL COMIC/CARTOON THAT RELATES TO PRISON ISSUES?

If you can, and we print it in a future issue, we will pay you \$15.

Make sure you send your complete mailing address on the page with your drawing. If you are an inmate, make sure you tell us any important payment information we need to know to send payment to your institution.

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*You can have
a new life
through your
faith in Jesus.*



Ask us how.

“Safety is of the Lord.”

May the God we love and serve
watch over us and protect us
from the attacks of our enemies...

Working Together is a business dedicated to Christian principles and theology. Its purpose is to build and preserve resources to help the Body of Christ survive the years leading up to the Biblical End Times. Prisons will be part of that End Time process, but they are not the main focus of Working Together efforts. **Food, water, shelter, employment, education, financial assistance, transportation, worship, fellowship, and other basic needs are the main directions of Working Together.** Most of these activities will be connected to membership status. Find out more by exploring our website at www.work2gather.us and **think about joining us.** Thank you.

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Because our space is limited, we reserve the right to edit for clarity and space needs.

INMATE to INMATE : This is just for inmate suggestions to each other. Send us your best suggestions on how to improve prison life.

Payment : 1 year subscription

ONE PAGE ARTICLE on any topic you feel is important to inmates, their families, or society. This is for anyone interested in this topic... inmates, family, friends, non-profits, prison staff.

Payment: \$20

FYI : let us know what is happening in your state's prison system — good, bad, or just for our information.

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