

Ohio Justice and Policy Center

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://ohiojpc.org/2015/11/16/a-trusted-and-knowing-friend/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

by [Marais Jacon-Duffy](#) | Nov 16, 2015 | [Blog](#) | [0 comments](#)

I left Harvard for Cincinnati at the end of my 1L year expecting to spend my time at OJPC learning about criminal justice, and how it might be made better. I've been interested in that question since, as a 13-year-old, I got my own second chance from the justice system; I grow more interested each year, as it becomes clearer how unequally our system provides those second chances.

OJPC taught me a lot about criminal-justice law and reform. It also taught me things I had not expected. One weekend stands out: that Friday, I visited clients with David Singleton at Dayton Correctional Institution; that Sunday, I spent the day with inmates at Marion Correctional as part of the TEDxMarionCorrectional event.

In Dayton, I saw, in David's interaction with the clients we visited, the kind of lawyer I hope to be: not just a smart and hard-working advocate, but a trusted and knowing friend. I saw how much strength David's clients take from his care for them as fellow humans people who have, like all of us, done good things and bad things, none of which can wholly define us.

In Marion, I remembered how rare that approach is. The incarcerated people I met at Marion spoke honestly about the mistakes they had made and their struggles for redemption. Many felt discouraged by a system they described as unwilling to treat anyone as redeemed. These people yearned for second chances but they also yearned for simple friendship. They described our roomful of strangers willing to listen as transformative.

I left OJPC even more committed to its mission than when I came. Among many other things, I take from OJPC the realization that the work of forging a better justice system requires more than deep knowledge and sharp arguments. It calls us to be friends, too.

Michael Zuckerman, Harvard Law School

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