

Transition and Support Committee
Annual Report
April 2019 to April 2020
Presented April 19, 2020 MWAB

This report covers our activities as we continue to serve men in Orange Correctional Center (OCC) as well as those whom we support when they return to the Chapel Hill community. Most of these activities have included volunteers from the Meeting in addition to the Transitions and Support Committee. *Note that this report was written before all our activities with the men in OCC were suspended in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. Support teams have maintained contact with men who have been released or who are anticipating release by the summer.*

Yokefellows at OCC: Along with other volunteers we attended Tuesday night meetings of Yokefellows at the Peace Center three times per month. Seated at round tables of two volunteers and four men, we got to know some of the men; these conversations also facilitated finding out who wanted to attend Meeting for Worship, the book club, and possibly requesting a support team when they are released. Paul Munk took several men to addiction recovery meetings in town. Last year Bonnie Raphael assisted one of the men in getting his life sentence reviewed by the Innocence Project at Wake Forest Law School; a change in his sentence is still pending.

Financial Support of Alamance Orange Prison Ministry: As many in our Meeting are aware, we conducted an annual fundraiser to support the chaplain and the ministry's activities at OCC. Richard Miller continued to coordinate the sale of walnuts this December, which generated \$1,290, the highest volume of sales among congregations participating in Yokefellows. We note that our youth supported the Ministry in the holiday Alternative Gift Market, resulting in an additional contribution of more than \$800.

Meeting for Worship at OCC: We had two meetings for worship last year at OCC and have meetings for worship scheduled this year for Sunday, August 9 and Sunday, October 4. Let us know if you would like to join us.

Current and former OCC residents in Meeting for Worship and other events at CHFM: Men from Meeting served as sponsors to bring one to three eligible men to Meeting for Worship, forums, and potluck. Returned citizens have also joined us for worship.

Following potluck each month we gathered with current OCC residents, returned citizens and members of the committee and other interested volunteers from the Meeting at large for discussion of issues of interest and concern for the group. We have considered some of these issues for discussion with prison administration when feasible. These conversations have been useful helping men plan their housing, employment, transportation and other details of their next steps after release and for us in our support. We understand that these gatherings and the Tuesday night Yokefellow meetings have helped the men break barriers among them in the prison.

Other support to friends at OCC: We participated in various events at OCC such as Parents Day, Black History celebration (now an annual event), and special meals prepared by the Cooking Class for Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. We hosted a birthday party on August 27 for men whose birthdays fell in that month. As volunteers through the Orange County Literacy Council, Maria Darlington, Bonnie Raphael, Paul and Joyce Munk also tutor men who are taking classes. With a new warden at OCC and recent additions in staffing in the Programs area, we hope for possible improvements in work release.

Crossing the Fenceline Book Club: Initiated by Tom McQuiston the book discussion group met on the fourth First Day of the month following Meeting for Worship at Fly Leaf Book Store. Six to nine men from the prison and others from the Meeting and T&S Committee participated in the discussion and shared pizzas. Multiple copies of the books were provided by local libraries. Travis Mason and then Nathaniel Picard have served as the OCC coordinator this past year, making sure the books are shared; Nathaniel has recently initiated at a Thursday 2 pm discussion group at OCC prior to the last Sunday meeting at Fly Leaf. This permits more men to participate who may not be able to attend on First Day.

Support Teams and Returning Citizens: Since March 2016 TSC teams have provided support for 21 returning citizens, and we continue to enjoy friendship with and support of a number of these men. This year we have supported 3 men in their returns to the area: *[names for our use only: Michael Conway (re-release this year and now Relapse and reincarcerated), Aaron Hayes (re-released this year) and Ira Jackson. Last year: Anthony Clark, Michael Conway, Aaron Haynes, Ed Harris]* and reinitiated assistance to two men {James Bony and David McDonald} who have returned to IFC Community House.

When returning citizens were released, our support circles of 2-3 people assisted them in obtaining necessary clothing from socks to winter coats, transportation to Social Security and government agencies, medical appointments, and job interviews. Finding employment and housing were sometimes recurring challenges for an individual and for our teams in supporting them. When more permanent housing was located, we assisted in locating and providing furnishings; on rare occasion, members have assisted with loans for rent deposits and facilitated referrals to the Returning Citizens Financial Assistance Committee.

Beyond this logistical support, relationship building is the greater part of our effort. Most of our time and energy goes to building friendships and offering support over coffee or meals. Occasionally, we continue to support returned citizens when they re-enter the criminal justice system, attending court hearings, speaking to attorneys on their behalf, and visiting them in jail and prison, and writing those who are at a distance. Please let us know you if have contacts for possible housing or employment.

Annual Picnic: This year we held our third annual Reunion Picnic at Southern Community Park in September, inviting 80 men with whom we have worked over the past several years. About 30 attended, including some family members, attended. We sponsor the picnic for returned citizens and Friends to renew old friendships and share about their successful re-entry strategies. While attendance was lower than last year, we decided to repeat this event in the fall of 2020. Friends are invited.

Returned Citizen Support Groups: In addition, two groups of the returned citizens are have been meeting in friendship and support of each other. Tom McQuiston has Wounded Healers for returned citizens who also work with young people in the community and a friend who returned recently also hosts a group. To advance the development of these groups, Tom obtained at large grant to train peer mentors.

Transition and Support Committee: Finally, our Committee meets the last Tuesday of the month to coordinate team support for individuals and to coordinate our interaction with other organizations and programs. When policies and operations at IFC Community House changed this year, we researched other recovery and transitional housing for former inmates in Orange and Durham Counties. We shared our list with OCC program staff and other re-entry personnel, who said it was much appreciated. Nancy Fisher is working with a newly created nonprofit that seeks to establish a house for returning men in Hillsborough. Asta Crowe and Richard Miller are members of the Local Reentry Council and the Citizens Resource Council. Hank Elkins is involved with Justice United and other initiatives related to appropriate housing and for mental health for returning citizens.

Our committee membership this year included Asta Crowe, Maria Darlington, Hank Elkins, Timothy Fogarty, Nancy Fisher, Tom McQuiston, Richard Miller Joyce Munk, Paul Munk, Bonnie Raphael, David Schneider, Monteze Snyder (current clerk), Byron Stevens, and James Taylor (JT). We anticipate several vacancies in July as long-term members rotate off of the committee while remaining active in other work. Please let us know if you are interested in possible nomination.

Respectfully submitted,

The Transition and Support Committee