



* Hey, Boo

— melissa bee 

After a bit of a hiatus, we're thrilled to bring back our Adopt an Inmate newsletter! It's been a few years, and so much has happened since our last update. We're excited to reconnect with you and share some incredible milestones and exciting updates as we look ahead to 2025

First and foremost, we've now matched over 3,500 people inside with supportive adopters — a testament to the power of connection and community.

Some of our biggest celebrations involve our own team. Since our last newsletter, our co-founder Rick and board member Martin have both been released and are now enjoying their freedom and working alongside us — a powerful reminder of why we do this work.


Our families have grown with children and grandchildren, and we've also sustained some difficult losses. As we learned early on, grief can awaken a wise and compassionate heart bringing us back to our spiritual center.

To Leah & Liz, you are absolutely indispensable. To our Board and Committee members, seasoned and new volunteers, dear friends inside and out who have supported me through the losses. No words are sufficient. For that, and for this incredible community, I remain deeply grateful.

Over the past year, we've focused on making much-needed improvements to our processes, which will allow us to be more efficient moving forward. We've made some changes to our [website](#), including a [Not-So-Frequently-Asked-Questions](#) page. While all this took a bit longer than expected, we're now back on track and more energized than ever. Thank you for your patience and continued support during this time.

We're also elated to announce that we received a recent grant award, from [The Autzen Foundation](#).


This funding will allow us to update and enhance our volunteer training videos to reflect our new procedures, ensuring our volunteers have the tools they need to make an even greater impact.

Our annual volunteer weekends continue to be a highlight of the year. Refreshments were generously provided for our most recent event by Trader Joe's and [Gratitude Brewing](#) in Eugene, OR, and handmade gifts by Lily  in Goodyear, AZ.

Thousands of pieces of mail flow through our PO Box each year — and our local volunteers are absolutely essential to managing this. After losing most of our local team during the pandemic, we are so grateful to [United Way of Lane County](#) and [Braver Angels: Southern Willamette Valley Alliance](#) for helping us rebuild our volunteer network.

This year, we hit an incredible milestone: ten years of advocacy! See page 3 to learn about our bold new campaign inspired by this decade of impact.

Thank you for being part of our journey. We're gearing up for our best year yet in 2025, with much thanks to your support and encouragement.


We are all potential criminals, and those whom we have put into prison are no worse, deep down, than any one of us. They have succumbed to ignorance, desire and anger, ailments that we all suffer from but to different degrees. Our duty is to help them.
--His Holiness, The Dalai Lama

**Inspired by a touching [scene](#) in the movie, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, those two words, 'Hey, Boo,' come at the moment in the movie when Scout (Mary Badham) coaxes the frightened neighborhood recluse Boo Radley (Robert Duvall) from the shadows. That moment, even more than the racial context of the story, conveys the essence of Lee's simple story: The openhearted encounter of people we find odd or frightening. Our work at AI can be summed up in that same way.*

Hear Rick & Melissa on the [Defund DOC Podcast](#) on 11/3/24



From The Inside Out

— Rick Fish

It used to be that the political bread and butter of a criminal prosecutor or D/A was conviction rates. In the past half-decade that appears to have changed somewhat with justice reforms such as cash bail reform and a few judges who aren't as enamored with police tactics as they once were.

One of these, [Justice David Fleischer](#) of Harris County, Texas is becoming a legend.

Watching Fleischer, it is still apparent that 95% of all convictions are obtained through plea bargaining. It's a practice that ought to be addressed. Perhaps bail reform will make a dent but prosecutors and judges can still lock people up indefinitely to coerce pleas.

The real problem with the justice system in the US is that it's focused on punishment only and that punishment can extend beyond a person's sentence. If that punishment can involve the whole of society, all the better.

One wonders if the public would treat their own children with the disdain and lack of mercy with which they treat people convicted of crimes.

Imagine a parent punishing his child for not cleaning his room.

"I. {smack} Told. {smack} You. {smack} To. {smack} Clean. {smack} Your. {smack} Room."

You might have to be GenX to understand that...

But let's say then the mom or dad dresses the child for school with a sign displaying the child's "crime" which he's forced to wear all day. Strangers can walk up and re-punish the child when they read the sign.

"Your. {smack} Mother. {smack} Told. {smack} You. {smack} To. {smack} Clean. {smack} Your. {smack} Room. {smack} And. {smack} You. {smack} Didn't."

That's what we do here in America with those convicted of crimes. Except rather than only the next day, they will be punished for the rest of their lives.

When people leave prison, whether their sentence is completed, or we allow them parole, a lot of flowery language is directed at reentry efforts which help them obtain jobs and housing. But it's mostly self-glorification because while those reentering were in prison, they received little or no preparation for returning to society. In rare cases, a person in prison can receive training in a trade. The programs are few and far between, limited to few facilities which are usually filled to capacity.

There's little incentive for any employer to give them a chance. In most states employers ask if the applicant has a prior record and will rule them out immediately if the answer is yes.

In states where a "ban the box" law has been passed, the benefit of not asking is usually overridden when they run a background check on the applicant. Sounded great when they passed the law and made advocates feel great for accomplishing reform. Practice rules it moot.

Same with housing. Many landlords refuse to rent to people returning from prison. Banks and mortgage lenders discriminate this way as well.

It. Says. Here. You. Committed. A. Felony. {smack}

It shouldn't be at all mysterious why recidivism runs high. We created a system that creates the problem and then get even more angry at those who return to crime as if the traps we laid are their own fault.

And the sex-offender registry makes many life-time pariahs and often homeless with little to lose.

What people in prison want most desperately is redemption.



At what point does society accept the sentence given as payment for their crime? The stark reality for society is that the millions locked up will have to return to society if they have anything less than a life-sentence. They will be neighbors and co-workers doing their best to live a life that doesn't involve criminal activity.

As a matter of fact, there are, by most estimates, at least 70 million people in the US with criminal records who have returned from jail or prison. Many live productive lives. It can be done. But it doesn't have to be so hard.

In Germany and other northern European countries, employers don't ask if applicants have been to prison because they assume that they were rehabilitated.

Yet now the EU has put in place the electronic travel authorization system (ETIAS) that will require anyone visiting Europe to disclose criminal history, likely preventing millions of Americans from traveling there.

We're going backwards.

That's why I'm so proud of what volunteers and adopters are doing through *Adopt An Inmate*. They are working to offer redemption to people who are in a system that seeks to deprive them of that possibility. In a world going the wrong way, they're moving against the tide.



Announcing Our New Campaign: Drop a Dime on Injustice

To mark a decade of advocacy, Adopt an Inmate is taking the conversation on the road with our latest campaign — Drop a Dime on Injustice — and we need your input to make our vision a reality.

The phrase "drop a dime," carries a symbolic meaning in prison culture, often referring to someone who provides critical information, or a "snitch." We're adopting (see what we did there?) this concept to provide a closer look at the realities of prison life and the urgent need for reform.

At the heart of this effort is a powerful centerpiece: a mobile exhibit featuring a life-sized replica of a prison cell. This interactive experience will educate the public about the harsh conditions millions of incarcerated people endure and the far-reaching impact of mass incarceration on individuals, families, and communities. Visitors will be invited to step inside the cell for ten minutes to gain a deeper understanding of these realities.

To launch the campaign, we're posing three key questions to justice-impacted people and their loved ones.

1. **The Good:** What's one positive thing you've seen or experienced in prison?
2. **The Bad:** What's one negative thing you've seen or experienced in prison?
3. **The Change:** If you could change one thing about prison, what would it be?

To submit your responses, use the [online form](#); or mail to us at:

Adopt an Inmate
ATT: DaD Campaign
PO Box 1543
Veneta, OR 97487



Together, we can make change!





Ripples

— Leah Patterson

Hello, dear friends!

It's been a while since our last newsletter, but rest assured, we've been hard at work! What a journey it has been — so much has unfolded that it's hard to capture it all. Here are some highlights:

We've come full circle in managing our data. When I last updated you, we were transitioning from Google Sheets to a new database. This year, we completed the migration to a more efficient system. It was a long and challenging process, but we're thrilled to have it in place. This new system will save time, streamline our processes, and let us move forward at full speed!

In recent years, we've facilitated 3,000+ adoptions, welcomed over 100 new volunteers, and logged more than 2,000 volunteer hours (plus countless hours from Melissa!).

We've also processed thousands of pieces of mail. Currently, we have nearly 5,000 inmates on our waiting list, with another 4,000 entered and awaiting biographical information for matching. The list keeps growing, and we're working hard to find more adopters to meet the need.

Our annual volunteer event, affectionately known as the Bee Fest, continues to thrive! Each year, it grows bigger and better, energizing our team and sparking fresh ideas. We also participated in United Way of Lane County's *Days of Caring*, with an increase in volunteer registration from 18 in our first year to 31 this year! On a personal note, I'm excited to share that I've moved back to Oregon, and we now have a dedicated workspace in Junction City, just 20 minutes from our AI Headquarters (though I still think that's a bit too far)!

It's hard to believe that I've been volunteering with *Adopt an Inmate* for eight incredible years, and while the organization has been operating for a decade, we're still working to gain national recognition and secure the funding we need to continue this vital work. Given the profound impact incarceration has on countless lives, it's astonishing that this issue remains so stigmatized, with many long-held but utterly misleading beliefs about the criminal legal system. Harmful stereotypes persist, and tens of billions are spent each year perpetuating cycles of incarceration and poverty.

We are determined to change this narrative through education, community partnerships, and storytelling. Mistakes are part of being human and offer opportunities for growth. I wholeheartedly believe in second chances and strive to illuminate the darkest corners of our justice system.

While millions in funding would be amazing (we'd settle for hundreds!), we remain steadfast in our mission to educate, dismantle stereotypes, and support those impacted by this broken system. Exciting opportunities lie ahead with new initiatives and partnerships.

Changing the world is exhausting and often disheartening, but as Melissa once said, "Through the individuals we touch, we have an exponential impact. That's where we change lives, and in turn, we change the world." That's where we change lives — and the world. If you're inspired to join us, reach out. I'd love to share how you can make a difference.





The Wall: Behind & Beyond

— Phillip A. Jones

I was thinking about perspective and what it means to each of us. Is it your interpretation of the things around you? How are we perceived by others? Outward appearance can sometimes be misleading. We have to inquire about each other's circumstances, before we assume.

It takes great discipline of one's self to do any amount of confinement, let alone multi-decades in prison. The environment induces stress, and causes both mental and physical health issues. I have noticed that, because I have been able to endure this long, under these conditions, and still appear to be successful, people believe that I am okay and not in need of support or help in obtaining my freedom!

I don't do the work that I do as a means of demonstrating that I am exceptional, or that prison has no effect on me...I do the work that I do to distract myself from the pain that I suffer! It is a coping mechanism, to try to mask the pain that three decades of incarceration has dealt me.

Now I understand what Nathan McCall's book title *It Makes Me Want to Holler* actually means. No one besides someone who is actually serving double digit sentences, or the family and friends who support loved ones inside, understand the agony of waking up every single day in a place like this. It is soul crushing, and it suffocates your spirit.

I am truly grateful for everyone who has been a part of this long and arduous journey, even those who have taken their leave from my life. However, remember that I am only human, and I am doing my level best to navigate this course with great composure and dignity...but I am not ALL RIGHT (alright). Take care, and have a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or the Holy Day of your choice!

If you'd like to get in touch with Phillip, you can find him on [Securus](#) by searching Washington state, and his ID# 881507 (he is listed as Alvin Jones). Also check out his [book Exit 2 Excellence: Reentry Workbook](#), and his podcast: [The Wall: Behind & Beyond](#).



A Mentor Changed My Life

— Eric Galamb

Life's experiences shape who we are and what we value.

Reflecting on your own journey, consider who has supported or inspired you. For me, Mr. Sweeney, my high school science teacher, sparked my passion for science and influenced my career path. Later, Mr. Hilton, my supervisor, was pivotal in my professional growth, helping me become a more well-rounded individual. Mrs. Pearsall, another supervisor, nurtured her team with kindness and encouragement, drawing out the best in us without harsh methods. My parents gave me a solid foundation, something not everyone is fortunate enough to have.

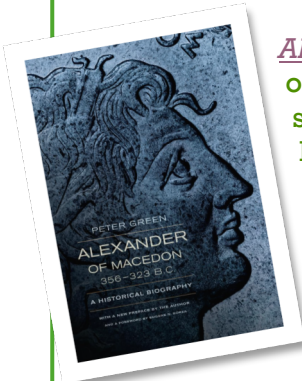
Approximately two years prior to retirement, I started to explore a new chapter of purposeful living. Rather than opting for a leisurely retirement, I chose to contribute my time and expertise towards promoting the value and rehabilitation of people in prison within the larger landscape of criminal justice reform. Motivated by a deep belief in second chances and the transformative power of mentorship, I now volunteer my time at *Adopt an Inmate* and mentor someone in prison, aiming to pave the way for his successful and productive life post-incarceration. My mentorship goals include the cultivation of skills and resilience that will empower him to contribute meaningfully to his community. My approach centers on supporting the individual. I aim to provide meaningful guidance, offer valuable insights and boost personal and professional growth. To be a successful mentor, it's crucial to focus on his goals for growth, rather than imposing your own ideas about what needs to be changed. This way, we create a partnership that drives real, meaningful progress and sets the stage for a brighter future.

Mentoring helps me stay mentally engaged and provides a chance to give back, share my knowledge, and positively impact others' lives.

Mentoring and being mentored are mutually beneficial and interdependent. I encourage you to stay open to learning from others.

Books

Check with the institution about policies for sending books. Most accept Amazon [AZ only accept books from Barnes & Noble)] If you're thinking of sending a book this month, consider one of the following:

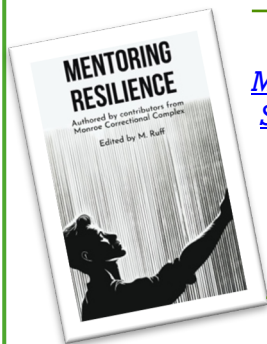
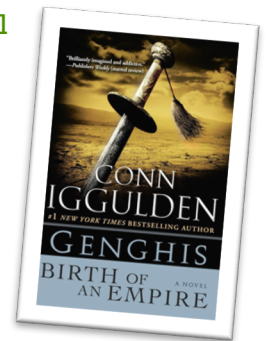


Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.: A Historical Biography by Peter Green. I am a huge fan of all things ancient Greek. I've read many histories of Alexander the Great from ancient sources to recent times. But I must say the way Peter Green wrote this book is outstanding. He doesn't do as so many have a habit of and just list Alexander's great accomplishments. He does a wonderful job of really painting the picture of a boy growing up and being raised in the shadow of a great man, of a boy who started out with one view of himself and the world but by the end become something totally different. He shows well how he could be understanding and gracious at times, while at others how he could throw the wildest temper fits over tiny things and make decisions that caused the deaths of thousands. It is the first history I've read of the man that showed both sides equally and as unbiased as possible. For any fan of Greece or just Alexander in general, I would consider this a must-read.

Christopher H in Tennessee

Genghis: Birth of an Empire: A Novel (The Khan Dynasty) by Conn Iggulden is a historical fiction novel. It is book one in the 5-book Conqueror series, about the birth of Genghis Khan and his rise to power. I have yet to have the chance to read the entire series. If the rest are only half as good as the first they will be a pleasure indeed. The writer does a wonderful job of describing life in a time and place alien to us today. But he does it in a way that other authors fail to accomplish by not boring you or being overly descriptive. To me he is up there with all all-time great in historical fiction like Ken Follet, Bernard Cornwall, Jeff Sharra, and Wilbur Smith. The way he puts you in the lives and minds of the. Young Khan, his family, and the tribes that roam the massive steps of Mongolia is amazing. For any fan of great historical fiction, I consider this also a must-read.

Christopher H in Tennessee



Mentoring Resilience: How Washington State Prisoners Address Troubled Youth Using Their Stories Authored by Contributors from Monroe Correctional Complex in Washington. A collection of stories from prisoners incarcerated in Washington state, showing why relief should be available to those with long sentences. We are so pleased to share that our colleague and incarcerated board member Joshua Sheperd contributed to this publication.

The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose by Chris Wilson. Growing up in Washington, DC, Chris Wilson was surrounded by violence and despair. He watched his family and neighborhood shattered by trauma, and he lost his faith. One night when he was seventeen, defending himself, he killed a man. He was sentenced to life in prison with no hope of parole.

But what should have been the end of his story became the beginning. Behind bars, Wilson embarked on a remarkable journey of self-improvement--reading, working out, learning languages, even starting a business. At nineteen, he sat down and wrote a list of all the things he intended to accomplish, and all the steps he'd have to take to get there. He called it his Master Plan. He revised that plan regularly and followed it religiously. Sixteen years later, it led him to an unlikely opportunity--and to a promise he has been working hard to live up to every day since. Harrowing, heartbreaking, and ultimately triumphant, *The Master Plan* is a memoir for this moment, proving that every person is capable of doing great things.

