



Angels of East Texas
July 2010

What is Bridges To Life?

Bridges To Life is a faith-based nonprofit 501©(3) corporation founded in November 1998, with a primary mission to reduce crime by reducing the recidivism rate of released inmates. Bridges To Life brings together victims and inmates – face to face – to help the inmates understand how crime affects others and to empower crime victims by telling their “stories” of victimization. By participating in face-to-face sessions inside the prison, both victims and offenders participate in a restorative justice process.

The spiritual mission of Bridges To Life is to minister to victims of crime and to inmates to show them the transforming power of God’s love and forgiveness. The healing process for wounded spirits must include a spiritual dimension. Bridges To Life welcomes inmates and volunteers of all faiths and religions.

What is Recidivism?

Recidivism is the rate at which released inmates return to prison. Prison population has reached record highs in Texas and the United States. It is estimated that up to 50% of released inmates resume their criminal activity and return to prison as recidivists. Reduced recidivism has significant economic and societal impact. Instead of costing the state of Texas for re-incarceration, ex-offenders are out working and supporting themselves and their families. A properly rehabilitated offender is paying taxes, going to a church, raising his or her children, and contributing to society rather than being a financial and emotional liability. It is, of course, impossible to measure the amount of savings in emotional trauma by rehabilitating inmates and reducing the number of crimes and crime victims. Inmates usually participate in our program within 18 months of their pending release. With the assistance of TDCJ Victim Services Division, Bridges To Life is tracking all inmates after they are released from prison. Perhaps most indicative of its impact is that 7,202 inmates have completed the program and 3,079 released inmates are currently in our recidivism study. Although our study is still in progress, only 542 inmates (17.6%) have returned to the system and only 34 (1.1%) have returned for violent crimes.

Bridges to Life Recidivism Stats

- 7,202 inmates have completed Bridges To Life since 2000
- 3,079 have been released from prison and in our recidivism study
- 542 have returned to prison – this represents a 17.6% recidivism rate* thus far
- 331 new convictions (10.7%); 211 technical violations (6.9%)
- Only 34 (1.1%) of released offenders have returned for violent crimes!

The Program

The Bridges To Life curriculum includes victim-impact panels and small-group discussions. Most of our time is spent in the small groups. A typical small group includes ten inmates and two volunteer facilitators. No preaching or lecturing is allowed in the small groups. The primary function of the facilitators is to ask key questions and to promote real listening to the answers given. It is truly a “listening project” that provides each group member a “safe place” to express his or her most personal thoughts, feelings and concerns.

Elements of the small groups include prayer, tough questions, self-disclosure, and honest letters written by the inmates to their victims and to the inmates’ family members, who have also been victimized. Although these letters are not actually delivered to the actual crime victims, the act of writing to their victim and their family member has proven to be a powerful part of the curriculum. The inmates must admit their crime, tell their story of criminal activity and accept responsibility for their actions.

The curriculum used the Restoring Peace book and a Study Guide with 14 weekly meetings and homework lessons. The weekly topics are:

- Week One: Orientation
- Week Two: Getting Started
- Week Three: Crime and Conflict
- Week Four: Faith
- Week Five: Stories
- Week Six: Responsibility
- Week Seven: Accountability
- Week Eight: Confession
- Week Nine: Repentance
- Week Ten: Forgiveness
- Week Eleven: Reconciliation
- Week Twelve: Restitution
- Week Thirteen: The Journey
- Week Fourteen: Graduation



Volunteer Opportunity

We need the help of more victim and facilitator volunteers to continue to grow and fulfill our mission. To date, virtually all volunteers have been blessed by the unique spiritual experience of Bridges To Life. If you would like further information, please email John Sage: jsage1@aol.com.

We need You!

One of the reasons our program has been so successful is that we have paid staff to coordinate each of our projects. Since we are currently working in 24 prisons, we have six regional coordinators living in different parts of Texas. We plan to complete 50 projects in the prisons in 2008, and each project consists of 14 weekly meetings. These projects will involve a total of 1,600 inmates and several hundred volunteers. The staff members must travel to these meetings to coordinate and manage volunteers, insure the consistency of the curriculum, and work with the prison staff to implement the weekly



meetings. Management is critical, particularly since prison is a difficult environment and there are many variables that can prevent the program from succeeding. I am pleased to report that our program is growing and succeeding. In order to continue this growth and success, we need financial support.



John Sage - Founder & Executive Director

The primary mission of Bridges To Life is to connect communities to prisons in an effort to reduce the recidivism rate of offenders and hereby effect a consequent reduction in crime in Texas. Under John’s leadership, Bridges To Life has experienced significant growth, currently utilizing over 300 volunteers participating in programs in twenty-two Texas prisons.

BRIDGES TO LIFE

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community volunteers to act as a “voice in court” for abused and neglected children. These Court Appointed Special Advocates™ (CASA) provided him with the detailed information he needed to safeguard the children’s best interests and ensure that they were placed in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. The program was so successful that it was copied around the nation. The first CASA program established in Texas was Dallas CASA in 1980. During that decade, 14 CASA programs were started in Texas. In 1989, Texas CASA was formed as a result of a merger between the Texas Task Force on Permanency Planning and the Texas CASA network that was made up of the existing CASA programs in the state.

Today, the CASA movement has evolved into one of the largest volunteer organizations in the country. In Texas, there are 68 local CASA programs with more than 5,000 volunteers serving 20,509 foster children.

Texas CASA, Inc. advocates for abused and neglected children in the court system through the development, growth and support of local CASA programs in Texas. CASA of Walker County was established in the fall of 2004 and began taking accepting cases in February of 2005. As of December 2008 CASA of Walker County represented 64 kids with 45 child advocates.

To Report Child Abuse, call 1-800-252-5400

CASA is a national volunteer movement that began more than 30 years ago, when Judge David Soukup in Seattle decided he needed to know more about the children whose lives were in his hands. His solution was to ask

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