



#### ABSTRACT

The issues of Poverty are hunger, education, family, racial inequality, social inequality, disability and more. This month we look at justice and its role in perpetuating poverty.

#### Justice Reform

This alone can reduce poverty and make our community safer!

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**Mission Statement:** *Partnering with the community to serve those who are in crisis to restore them to freedom and purpose through the transforming power of the Gospel.*

Why do we have jails and prisons?

Many would say that the entire corrections system is to be about punishment to such a degree that it will present a deterrent to crime. However, in a discussion with guests of the Gospel Rescue Mission in 2019, they report “The first night you spend in prison is the worst night of your life. But the second night, that’s just your life.” When asked if the thought of fines or imprisonment even entered their mind before committing crimes the consistent answer was that they assumed that they would not get caught. Many answered that they could care less about fines or jail. A couple of souls reported that they committed crimes for the purpose of being put in jail. These few reported that in jail they had warmth or air-conditioning (season dependent), they had a bed to sleep in and three meals a day. They also reported that they were not lonely in jail. These answers are consistent from those that have spent time in jail. The bottom line, as a state, our current penalties are not only not a deterrent to future crime, in some cases they are actually an incentive to commit crimes.

Once an arrest happens the groups consistently report being talked to and treated like

<p>The label of “Felon” The ultimate scarlet letter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “When people hear that I am a felon they take a step back.”</li><li>• “No one asks what my felony was for, they assume I am violent”</li><li>• “When I have to tell someone that I am a felon, shame overwhelms me and I feel less than human.”</li></ul>
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animals. “Nobody will listen.” “Nobody cares.” “We are treated like cattle.”

In court there is a great feeling of uncertainty. Some report that they can feel the people in court room judging them. The most common thought going through most of their minds is, “How much time will I get this time?”

Currently our jails and prisons are paid based on numbers of inmates that they are watching at any given moment. This does not create an incentive to encourage these men and women to make new choices when they get out.

Jails and prisons have their own subculture of society with its own unwritten rules and laws. These men and women not only lose their freedom but also lose their identity and their dignity. In interviews with men and women coming to receive services through the Gospel Rescue Mission in Muskogee, we consistently heard that no one cares about them in DOC or in the city or county jails.

“Going in was terrifying,” said one man. Another man reported, “It was like a bad dream.” As they are brought into the system they are not told much. Consistently these men and women report that they are asked two questions: are you suicidal, and are you racist? Those questions lead to where you will be placed in the jail warehouse system. Most likely you will be in a space with seven or more others in a space that is designed for two people.

When asked about whether that fear was enough to keep them from committing crimes again, the consistent answer is that jail and prison is not that bad. “It’s not as bad as it is on television.” Initially they all reported incredible fear and most report feeling their dignity going away.

Every day life incarcerated is simple. You wake up, eat breakfast and go to sleep. You sleep until lunch, eat lunch and then go to sleep. You wake up, eat dinner, go to sleep. No one interviewed talked about any programs or conversations that would help them get ahead in life when they got out. In fact, most report this feeling that no one there cares about them and in fact society expects them to fail. Others report that they learn how to be more shifty and manipulative.

The only consistent fear was many of the mentally ill who were now off of their medications and no one in authority seemed too concerned about getting the medications for them.

Also consistently, those interviewed reported that they had full access to whatever they wanted, drugs, alcohol, pornography or any vice they might want. Everything works through the barter system. Guards sell drugs to inmates. Drugs come in the mail and with visitors. Women smuggle in items within them. There is nothing in the detention system that leads to any rehabilitation.

When the time comes to be released, returning citizens typically sit around for four or more hours waiting for the final release. When they are released it is often in the middle of the night, because the facility can collect for an extra day if they keep the person even one minute into the new day. Additionally, they are released in whatever clothing they were arrested in. That might mean they are being released in shorts and t-shirts in the middle of the night. This too encourages

Race in Incarceration
In Oklahoma for every 100,000 people incarcerated: 740 white / 3252 black
-via the Sentencing Project
Compare to total population: 65% White /10% black
Incarcerated population 19% White/81% black

them to leave  
angry and  
ready to  
return to  
whatever  
crimes that  
got them

there in the first place.

## **Lack of expertise in our jails and prisons**

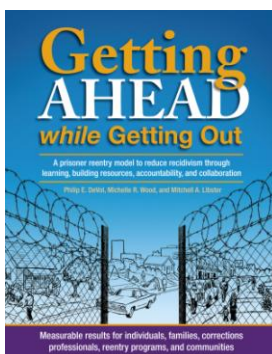
Ms. Dockery was sent to the work-release center for just shy of a year after she violated probation on a shoplifting conviction. Because she had failed a drug test on arrival, officers dismissed her complaints as those of a user in withdrawal, an ordeal that is rarely life-threatening. But she died of sepsis, probably caused by a perforated ulcer in her intestine, according to James P. Elliott, the Elkhart County coroner.  
(NY Times January 30, 2019)

Mental illness and addiction are two of the most common issues that those in jails and prisons are facing when they arrive. The current system is not designed to help these men and women learn life skills free of substance or how to handle their mental illnesses. These issues often lead to reentry to the jail or prison system in the future. Failure to help them ensures that the system will continue to make money. But it also, as in the above stated cases and many more not always reported in the papers, leads to death. My question that I wrestle with is this, “What if Ms Dockery, had received treatment and was not released until she had a season of clean time? What if when she was released she was released to a life coach, a place to live and a job? The money spent on detaining her could now be used to fund these programs to help her reintegrate. If they remove the label and she proves herself to be a good mother, her children could be raised in a healthy home surrounded by love. But as this story played out, Ms Dockery is dead. Her five children have no mother to turn to and all they will be told is that your mother died in jail. Can we do better?

## **Overview of the current program of Gospel Rescue Mission**

Currently our city and county jail is routinely 150 inmates over its capacity. According to the County Commissioner, the costs to house these inmates can range from \$40-\$50 a day. Traditionally, our jails serve a punishment function; but little in the way of rehabilitation.

We recognize that not all inmates desire life change. The desire and willingness to change is not something Gospel Rescue Mission can bring out with any program. That decision has to be born in individual choice. What we propose to do is identify likely candidates that do want a second chance and walk with them as they pursue new choices.



In partnership with the City of Muskogee, County of Muskogee, Green Country Behavioral Health and other allies, Gospel Rescue Mission is working to provide

our Getting Ahead When Getting Out program in addition to guidance counseling to other services as needed as a portion of rehabilitation efforts.

*The base of the program is the workbook “Getting Ahead While Getting Out”. Much of the same material that is included in Muskogee Bridges out of Poverty program is included with some additional sections for those who have a criminal record. The program will help them choose wisely where they live, who they associate with and a plan on how to deal with the challenges of having a criminal record when applying for jobs or renting a place to live.*

Entry Point 1: Municipal Court

- Willing to stay at GRM for 12 weeks
- Must pass drug test no later than week 1 on all drugs (exception made on THC)
- Must pass drug test no later than day 30 for THC
- Must complete GRITU online course (Pass one level every 3 weeks)
- Must work personalized plan

Entry Point 2: County Court

Screened via 3 weeks of Community Service (Also reduces fines)

- Willing to stay at GRM for at least 12 weeks or until complete Getting Ahead classes (For those needing shelter)
- Must pass drug test no later than week 1 on all drugs (exception made on THC)
- Must pass drug test no later than day 30 for THC
- Must complete GRITU online course (Pass one level every 3 weeks) (For those needing shelter)
- Must work personalized plan
- Can continue to do Community Service to work off fines
- Must actively participate in first open Getting Ahead When Getting Out Class offered at GRM or through Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World (Bridges out of Poverty)

Entry Point 3: County Jail



**Selection Committee (Sheriff, Jail officials, Green Country). GRM takes recommendations to identify willing participants.**

**10-12 at a time participate in “Getting Ahead When Getting Out” while still in jail.**

**Those who actively engage in classes and pass drug screen get Community Service to work off fines. Supervisor writes up weekly evaluation on their work performance. Those with good ratings continue.**

**While preparing for release, an evaluation is performed in the last month. Applications with reference from Community Service will be submitted.**

**Leave jail with a reentry plan to include housing plan and a job**

**PROJECT COSTS**

**Program Participant for 12 weeks**

**Meals: \$375.48**

**Shelter: \$1301.16**

**Programming material: \$56.00**

**Total: \$1732.64**

Taxpayer Cost if still in jail:

\$3360 to \$4200

Giving 50 people a second chance:

\$86,632

Jailing 50 people:

\$168,000 - \$210,000

# Reform

Current reform efforts seem to be focused on simply reducing the numbers of incarcerated individuals by reducing the number of crimes that cause people to be incarcerated. This is shifting the problem rather than working to solve the problem. It is time to take real action to reduce crime, particularly the recidivism rate.

Reform Concept 1: Adjust our prisons to have specific themes focused around treatment.

- One prison would be focused on mental health issues
- One prison would be focused on addiction issues
- One prison would be for those that really don't want to make any life changes. This one would have the least amount of privileges.
- Others would simply be places where men and women could receive training on how to live a more community and healthy life. Almost like a school of healthy and productive life. Think of it as a college for real life.
- The focus of all of these programs is to get men and women the help while they are locked up so that they are less likely to commit crimes when they get out.

Reform Concept 2: Change sentencing laws

Principle 1: Change what it takes to get out:

- No one released without state approved ID
- No one released without GED or Equivalent
- No one released without a tax paying job



- Phase system of growth passed on to next phase by council to include
  - Prison officials
  - Mental Health assessment
  - Program manager
  - The final phase needs to include a class on how to function outside of jail/prison.
- Most importantly if they are released to society based on a demonstration of growth they should not also carry the lifetime sentence of also having the label of “felon” go with them. They are simply a returning citizen and then a citizen.

Principle 2:

- When the returning citizen is released they are released with the following in place
  - Safe and Secure shelter
  - Transportation
  - Food
  - Life Coach

Reform Concept 3: Establish a program to help families reunite after incarceration.

- Point: The families have been living life and changing as has the returning citizen.
- Point: The world has been changing as the returning citizen has been behind bars.
- To set up these families for success a non-profit is needed to offer counseling and guidance for the returning citizen beginning at least 1 month before release.

Reform Concept 4: Change how for- profit prisons are paid

- Currently prisons paid for babysitting.

- Should be paid for results: Paid of prisoners staying out of trouble for 6 months, 1 year and 5 years.

#### Reform Concept 5: Communities need to assess race in their police interactions

- States should pass a law that triggers an action committee (Social workers, government officials, law enforcement and business representatives) to be formed to investigate and suggest changes if any local jail or prison has a disproportionate number of minorities in detention.
  - Note we acknowledge the numbers will never be exactly right on but jails/prisons should be a microcosm of the local population when it comes to race. How much off a community is off would need to be negotiated.
  - Note this is not to be an affirmative action type program for jail. Instead it should trigger an investigation into why that is happening at any given time.
  - Numbers should be examined monthly.

#### Reform Concept 6: More precise scheduling of court times

Currently those waiting in County Court are scheduled for a specific date. Often times that means having to take an entire day off of work. Creating a schedule will enable these men and women to more easily maintain employment and pay off their fines.

***NOTE: Suggested improvement to the current GRM program. GRM could intensify the Getting Ahead Program to include more drug tests, facilitator (student) assessment testing their understanding of the information, require a full time job for graduation. Once that is complete the participants would have their felonies expunged once all fines and fees paid in full.***

NY Times Article January 30, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/us/lamekia-dockery-death-jail-prison.html?action=click&module=News&pgtype=Homepage>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/06/lens/juvenile-incarceration-california-brian-l-frank.html?action=click&module=Editors%20Picks&pgtype=Homepage>

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GRM Shelter and community meal time guests (January –March 2019)

Getting Ahead When Getting Out (GRM Class 4)