Against All Odds

Dir. Mohr welcomes board, showcases new programs
CURE-Ohio’s executive board met with ODRC Director Gary Mohr and staff members Steven Huffman, Gregory Trout, Trevor Clark, Norm Hills, and Robin Knab in early August for a get-acquainted and informational session.

Dir. Mohr, personable and cordial as befitting a one-time grade-school teacher, said he scrapped the old full-page ODRC mission statement for a new concise one: “To reduce recidivism among those we touch.” To that end, Mohr has initiated a new system of three tiers of prisons and a whole shopping list of new programs.

Tier system consolidates gang members and violent inmates in several prisons, removing them from the mainstream and from negatively affecting inmates who want to peacefully do their time—who comprise the middle tier. The third tier, Reintegration, aims to prepare inmates for reentry.

Unit Management will be pumped up, to proactively manage prisoners and be more responsive to their needs, and to help them prepare for parole hearings and reentry.

Parole Board. “I don’t think abandoning the parole board process is the right thing,” Mohr averred. He added that, following the Over-65 review, a parole board statement that all those older inmates still incarcerated “need to be there” was taken out of context. Mohr is now dedicated to transparency in the parole process, e.g. letting parole candidates know what to expect and how to prepare for their hearing. The “Solutions Project” is a unit program dedicated to Old Law prisoners, building self esteem for those who have the least hope, getting them actively involved in work toward getting out. He cautioned that participation in the program does not guarantee release, however.

Eliminating college programs. Mohr was asked how cutting out college and advanced training (e.g. dental) courses in prisons goes along with his reintegration policies. ODRC had been spending $4 million for college for 2000 inmates, paid out to telephone revenue. With a $50 million deficit looming, they had to cut costs somewhere. ODRC asked Wilmington College to do specific programs at LeCI and WCI, but they refused. Hocking College withdrew voluntarily from offering prison classes. Money diverted from college can pay for new programming, e.g. a diesel mechanic program at GCI. Mohr is confident the new programming will attract even more inmate-students and be successful. Some of the new programs are:

- Looking at entrepreneurial skills, so ex-prisoners can start their own businesses.
- CDL (truck driver) program, now training 120 men per year; all will be hired.
- Health information technology
- Preliminary courses in substance abuse counseling for inmates who wish to pursue that career path after release.
- Programs for veterans, including special vet units.
- Wellness units with a holistic view focusing on weight loss, diabetes, and other chronic health problems.
- Computer technology.
- At Trumball, working with Job & Family Services on a “one-stop shop” for release, including MUSCLE and resume writing.
- Army recruiters coming into the prisons. Special military-type units to prepare inmates for service after their release.

DEFENDANT'S EXHIBIT
Let's Admit the War on Drugs Is a Colossal Failure
By Karen Thimmes

"We don’t have a Drug Problem; we have problems from drug addiction and problems due to the War on Drugs," stated attorney Michael Uth at a workshop on that topic, part of the 2012 ACLU-Ohio conference in July in Columbus.

He said there were many drug addicts in the 19th century who led successful, respectful lives. Morphine, the drug of choice then, was easily obtainable and affordable, as were clean needles. And drugs were legal.

Today’s addicts deal with obtaining illicit and pricey substances, dirty needles, eluding the police, and are often forced into crime to support their habit. If caught using or selling drugs, they face prison. With a felony conviction, they are barred from public housing, student loans, even voting in some states.

The Fourth Amendment (no unlawful search) is disintegrating; no warrant or probable cause is needed to detain an international traveler who might be smuggling drugs. The Fifth Amendment, too, is coming under fire. Police may seize a suspect’s car, house, etc. even before he is found guilty. “Civil Asset Forfeiture” is now a widespread practice which funds police operations. The US also permits kidnapping drug trafficking suspects from overseas.

Blacks comprise about 15% of drug users, but a far greater percentage goes to prison. Of Latinos, 46% are drug offenders but use/sell less than Whites.

Marijuana has been proven to give relief for pain of various conditions. Even the AMA has asked the government to back off. Studies show it’s safe; yet the government insists it is dangerous and harmful. The drug war has created an atmosphere of fanaticism that denies this remedy to sick people.

Europe treats its hard-core addicts by administering maintenance heroin under supervision. Addicts in such programs are able to stabilize their lives, get jobs, rejoin their families, even get off heroin. Portugal decriminalized drugs and now has fewer deaths, overdoses and infections. Why isn’t America putting its “war” funds toward treatment and prevention? Why do we not divert the money, effort and time to fighting real crime? The US needs to restore our civil liberties and give relief to suffering people, Uth averred. The War on Drugs is ineffectual: we still have addicts, drugs flow freely, drug lords are rich, but the government refuses to admit defeat. The DARE school program is a joke. Drug policies are causing more death and destruction than any others. Drug war profits worldwide rival the US defense budget.

The new threat: painkillers
The painkiller epidemic is exaggerated, Uth insisted. It is easier for the DEA to go after doctors and pharmacists than drug lords. Too many patients suffer with untreated pain due to fearful doctors. Heroin is the best painkiller for certain cancers. If you are in legitimate pain with no drug history, you can become dependent on drugs, but not addicted to them—if you can persuade your doctor to prescribe drugs for you. In other countries, physicians regulate the drugs, but here it is law enforcement agencies allied with the Justice Department.

Three Join Parole Board in July
Former warden Mark Houk is one of three new members of the Ohio parole board. He served at LoCI, SOCl, OSP and LorCl. Ron Nelson, a career ODRC employee, also joined the board. The third appointee is Andre Imbragno, most recently Staff Counsel for ODRC. Together with six longer-serving members including Director Cynthia Mausser, they comprise the “full board” of 9 members.
SUMMER SHORTS

7th Denial for John Lennon’s Killer

Mark David Chapman, 57, who shot John Lennon to death in 1981, was denied parole for the seventh time. His NY parole board said while he had no earlier convictions and good conduct, programming, and educational accomplishments, plus other “positive” prison behavior, these were not enough to warrant parole. Sounds like the Ohio parole board!

Bring Back the 65%

The Violent Crime Control & Law Enforcement Act of 1994 authorized funding to interest states (27 + the District of Columbia) to take advantage of it for state prisons to assure that inmates served at least 85% of their sentences. Now, that grant money is no longer available, so why continue this requirement? Why not return to serving 65% of a sentence?

Hot Times in Texas Fell Prisoners

Ten Texas inmates died of heat-related hyperthermia in summer 2011. Texas-CURE, long concerned about lack of air conditioning for prisoners, esp. those with breathing or heart conditions, has raised money for several years to buy fans for indigent inmates and this year purchased 570 fans.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Texas-CURE’s suit may proceed against the TX Dept. of Criminal Justice. The suit holds that “allowing a prisoner to be exposed to extreme temperatures can constitute a violation of the Eighth Amendment.”

HRW studies impact of SO laws on youth

An attorney with Human Rights Watch (1441 Sansom St., #729, Philadelphia, PA 19102; email pittman@hrw.org) has been interviewing sex offenders around the country to determine the impact of SO laws on persons under age 18. She would like to gather specific information on how SORNA and similar laws have impacted registrants and their families. To access the anonymous survey, go to: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/QY7YZMP

Atty. Pittman intends to start writing her report this Sept, and HRW plans to publish and release it in November.

We’re #1—in Solitary Confinement

“The US holds far more prisoners in segregation or solitary confinement than any other democratic nation on Earth,” stated Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill. this summer during Senate hearings. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also warned the Senate Judiciary Committee that placing people with severe psychiatric symptoms in prison solitary is “akin to pouring gasoline on a fire,” in that it exacerbates such symptoms as paranoia, depression, anxiety, hallucinations, tendency to suicide, self-mutilation, and sleep problems.

UN Head Decrees Death Penalty

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on member states which still utilize execution to abolish the practice, stressing that the right to life lies at the heart of international human rights law. “Where the death penalty persists, conditions for those awaiting execution are often horrifying, leading to aggravated suffering,” he added. The General Assembly called for a worldwide moratorium on the DP in 2007. More than 150 countries abolished it or no longer use it. But 32 member states, including the US, still sentence people to death, including some juveniles.

Heads Roll in Lebanon Corr. Sex Scandal

Former ODRC Director Ernie Moore took over as warden at LeC1 in Aug. after a sex scandal there resulted in firing of health care administrator Amy Weiss for groping and raunchy remarks, and warden Timothy Brumman was removed. Two other staff members, (including director of sex offender treatment) had resigned earlier for inappropriate actions.

CURE chapter for women prisoners! CURE—Women Incarcerated, PO Box 287, Fort Loudon, PA 17224.
What's Really Up with Judicial Release

Some of you can recall when you were on the outside and bought lottery tickets. You'd sit by that TV at 7:30pm to see if your number hit. There were times when you might have won $40 when you were hoping for millions.

The “Judicial Release Game” isn’t much different. Statistics show that only one out of every 476 people who file for judicial release actually gets it. Of the people who do get it, 93% live in rural areas. Inmates from “metro” counties don’t have much of a chance. So, is filing for JR a waste of time and paper? Not necessarily. But for sure, if you have a chance of getting JR and the judge learns you got just one ticket, you most likely won’t be released, since the judge will figure, if you can’t obey the rules in prison, why should he trust you to obey rules and laws in society?

Your chances of getting JR are much better if a lawyer files the motion for you. If you write well, you could probably fare better doing your own motion, rather than having a jailhouse lawyer do it for you. After all, a Motion for JR is similar to a job resume. The only difference is, instead of trying to get a job, you're trying to get out prison early. One thing for sure, just as you won't win the lottery if you don't buy a ticket, you can't get JR unless you file the motion for it.

If or when you file for it, it's always a good idea to first express remorse. Don't use lawyer language. Judges also don't like giving JR to prisoners who don't have a plan. The judge wants to know if you’ve got a stable residence, a viable job possibility (not your uncle's garage or construction company). And don't plead, “My momma and kids need me home.” The judge may reason, “Why didn’t you think about that when you committed the crime?” Nor does the judge want to hear that God was lost—that's what it sounds like when you write that you “found God.” Be remorseful, truthful and sincere, and maybe you'll be that one in 476 who wins the Judicial Release Lottery!

The forms for JR motions should be in your law library. Good luck!

Move Over, Michael Phelps!

They may not have been able to go to London to participate in the Olympic Games, but the very first U.S. choir to sing in the 2012 World Choir Games still won gold—twice!

On July 12, the 16 members of Umoja Choir at WCI waited anxiously to learn how judges had evaluated their July 3 performance. When the scores were read announcing that Umoja had won double gold, a wave of emotions permeated the visiting room where the inmate singers and staff had been waiting for two hours for the judges to arrive.

Camera crews from TV networks across the globe captured the moment while flashes from other cameras created a strobelight effect. It was certainly a Cinderella moment for the DRC. Choir members received certificates and mock gold medals since prisoners are obviously not permitted to possess gold!

Under the direction of Dr. Catherine Roma of Wilmington College, the men had worked for nearly a year to prepare their eight award-winning selections. The moment was also used to announce the release of their new CD.

Umoja, 7th Step Give Back

Members of the 7th Step Foundation (reentry preparedness) at PCI enabled high-risk youth at Gladden Community House in Columbus to play softball and soccer this summer by donating money to cover purchase of athletic equipment and uniforms. The men raised money through selling pizza and fried chicken for several months when they read that Gladden was struggling for funds. Way to go, guys!

At WCI, the Umoja Choir donated proceeds from their new CD, “Extend a Hand,” to several local charities. This action reflects the lyrics of some of the CD songs which talk about helping those who are down and out.
Video Visiting: pros & cons

Dir. Gary Mohr has stated that video visiting will be introduced in Ohio, and in fact a vendor has already been selected.

This can be a good thing for out-of-state families, for elderly or handicapped relatives unable to drive, and even for families without cars or the gas money to go to the prisons. No one disputes that family contact and support are beneficial to an inmate’s time in prison and to his success upon reentry.

The District of Columbia, which recently switched to video visiting only in its jails, says they can increase the number of daily visits, eliminate long lines and security checks, low staff costs, and contraband that visitors might bring in. Best of all, it saves $420,000 a year.

The downside to video visiting is lack of physical contact—the hugs, kisses, holding one’s child—and reduction in body language. Inmates miss out on the vending machine treats they normally enjoy at visit.

CURE-Ohio understands the benefits to the prison system of video visiting but would hope it will remain an ALTERNATIVE to standard in-person visiting, not a replacement for it.

Shuttle Service Info Sought

It would be helpful to folks without cars if we could print a listing of companies who provide shuttle services to the prisons. If you utilize such services, please send us contact info and details such as price and prisons served.
Ex-Felons, Parolees MAY Vote!!
Ohio is progressive in that, unlike some states, it does not strip releasees, probationers and parolees of their right to vote. But you must register—at Board of Elections or a library. Deadline is Oct. 7. Just do it!

In Memorium: Debbie Zandarski
CURE received word of the death of prisoner advocate Debbie Zandarski on April 16, 2010. She was active in the late 80’s/early 90’s, helping inmates and visiting prisoners.

CURE Position: No More SO Registries!
CURE internationally and in Ohio takes the position that sex offender registries are a waste of resources, do little to bolster public safety, create obstacles to reintegration of ex-felons into society. Recidivism rates for released SO’s hover around 5%. It’s imperative that legislators address this problem and rescind or refine these laws, which have created new pariahs and ghettos and needlessly ruined lives.

CURE-OHIO
Membership Information
When you join CURE-Ohio, you get:
• Membership in the state chapter
• Automatic membership in National CURE.
• Quarterly National newsletters & the CURE-Ohio quarterly newsletter, Against All Odds.

Join or Renew Today!
- Prisoner $5/yr $2.50/6 mo.
- Embossed envelopes or stamps accepted.
- Individual $10/yr Family $20/yr
- Supporter $50/yr
Indicate NEW or RENEWAL; include inmate nr.! Send to CURE-Ohio, PO Box 14080, Columbus, OH 43214.
Support of FAMILIES is especially important. They can contact their legislators, talk about prison issues with others in the community, and most important, cast a VOTE!

2012-13 Executive Board
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