



Justice

Just Perspectives

Struggle for Community Justice Goes On

The ten-year-old Community Justice Resource Center (CJRC) scraped through to victory in the 2010 budget debate, with the odds stacked heavily against this highly successful day reporting alternative to jail in Milwaukee.

With a budget of nearly \$1million and lack of support from the Sheriff, in whose budget it rests, the CJRC was eliminated from County Executive Scott Walker's *no tax increase* budget this fall. With strenuous advocacy from the Benedict Center, justice leaders and the community led Supervisors to adopt an amendment by a 15-4 vote to restore funding, only to have the amendment fall under Walker's veto pen.

In a tense budget debate, with insufficient revenue for many essential needs, the Board ultimately voted 14-5 to override the veto and save the CJRC . . . for now. Supervisors who stood strongly with County Executive Scott Walker and Sheriff David Clarke in opposition to the CJRC were Mark Borkowski, Paul Cesarz, Joseph Rice and Joe Sanfelippo. Supervisor Lynne DeBruin joined the four in opposing the budget override.

What did they vote against?

A day reporting alternative to incarceration with a success rate of better than 85% one year after completion, at one-fifth the cost of a day at the Correctional Facility South (House of Correction) or one-tenth the cost of a day at the Correctional Facility Central (Jail).

Participants at the CJRC go home on electronic monitoring, learning to cope with the forces that drew them into criminal behavior. They also have the opportunity to give back to neighborhoods damaged by crime through Restorative Community Service, contributing thousands of hours of service. Wilbert Saint Julien coordinates the community service component at the CJRC for the Benedict Center.

A county-wide justice advocacy coalition brought together by the Benedict Center originally researched, organized and advocated for the day reporting center – against great odds – in the mid-nineties.

The fight for justice was different this year, though. This year, justice leaders and the new Milwaukee County Community Justice Council, which includes the Benedict Center, led the charge to save the CJRC when it was removed from the budget at the Sheriff's request, according to a statement from Walker.

Chief Judge Jeffrey Kremers, District Attorney John Chisholm, Public Defender Tom Reed and the Benedict Center Executive Director met repeatedly during the budget process with representatives from the County Board, Sheriff's Office and Public Policy Forum to craft a strategy that would improve operations at the

CJRC. Lesser offenders report daily for drug treatment, education, cognitive programming, community service and job preparation, all of which saves the taxpayer money *and* at increases opportunities for participants. The model is very similar to the Benedict Center's gender-specific program for women, but provides greater security with electronic monitoring and deputies on site.

How odd it is that forces in Milwaukee so strongly resist change that has proven, elsewhere and right here, to be cost-effective and safer than imprisonment for lower-level offenders in the long run.

While the battle is won initially, the war is not over. As a constitutionally-elected official, the Sheriff is not obligated to support the CJRC. The Judiciary and District Attorney have agreed to some operational changes sought by the Sheriff, but the Board patched together funding by proposing to keep one dorm at the South facility closed all year. In the past, dorms have been closed to save about \$425,000 each annually. The Sheriff does not support this plan. In the end, however, the Sheriff must answer to the voters.

If our community does not value and speak up for restorative opportunities for individuals who are in conflict with the law, we will ultimately channel nearly all of our scarce tax dollars into jail and prison cells. We will be no safer and will deprive many individuals the help they need to lead crime-free lives in the future.

--Kit Murphy McNally



Men from the CJRC working with Habitat for Humanity and in Alice's Garden.



Education Momentum Builds Toward More GEDs

More women than ever are participating in the Adult Basic Education and GED/HSED components at the Benedict Center. Students fill two classrooms and spill out to desks in the hallway and alcoves. Many are making impressive strides towards passing each of five tests required to earn a GED. Each test measures skills in one of five academic areas – reading, social studies, science, writing and mathematics.

Approximately 80 women have enrolled in education classes this year. Since January, 19 women have taken at least one GED test. Out of 38 tests completed, only two failed to achieve a passing score of 410. Most scored well above the minimum, with the highest so far being 700. Three women completed all five tests by last June and received their diplomas during ceremonies at MATC.

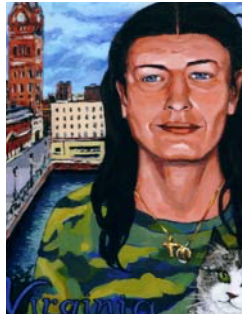
Women enrolled in the program have worked with 28 tutors from Marquette, UWM and the community over the past year, asking questions, applying skills and reinforcing knowledge in a one-on-one, interactive educational experience. “It is encouraging to see so many women succeed, given that some of them began below 8th grade level, the starting point for GED studies,” said Coordinator of Academic Instruction David Peters. “The Benedict Center is on target to double the number of GED graduates this spring.”

The education component at the Benedict Center is a community-based program affiliated with the Pre-College Division of MATC. Women who successfully pass the battery of five tests by May 2010 will participate in a formal graduation ceremony at MATC in June.

--Lindsey Paulsen

New Talent Joins Benedict Center Board

- **Jamie Lewiston**, RN, MS, Director of Patient Care, Aurora Behavioral Health Services
- **Maria I. Rodriguez**, Youth and Family Service Manager, Housing Authority, City of Milwaukee
- **Stephanie Russell**, Director, Office of Mission and Identity, Marquette University
- **Susan Watkins**, President, All Night Child Care
- **Lindsey A. Paulsen**, Assistant Account Executive, Branigan Communications
- **Bonnie Vermiglio**, Vice President, Business Banking, Chase Bank



Volunteer tutor, Elizabeth Vogt, does more than work on the three R's with her students, which include Virginia (pictured below with tutor Alice Davis). Vogt also paints portraits, as the one to the left of Virginia, complete with personal symbols so women can see themselves as the successful individuals they have become.



Many women come to the Benedict Center certain that they cannot learn and fearful of trying in case they prove themselves correct. But with perseverance comes achievement and confidence. Once believing that she wasn't smart enough to learn, Virginia has proven to herself that not only can she learn, she can excel, scoring considerably higher than the required score to pass the GED tests. With much hard work and dedication, Virginia is close to achieving her dream of studying to become a vet tech.



Sharonda Jackson (left) and Rachel Blake (right), pictured with Dave Peters, Coordinator of Academic Instruction, earned their GEDs last June.

In Memoriam



Fergal Gallagher joined the Benedict Center as Grants Manager in May 2009 and crafted more than 40 tightly written proposals and reports before his sudden death August 2. The entire staff was deeply saddened by the loss of Fergal's compassionate nature, good humor and complete understanding of the Benedict Center mission.

This gentle Irishman distinguished himself as a university professor, leader of Easttown Business Association, founder of Jazz in the Park, host of Irish music radio programming, pillar of Irish Fest planning and production and, for far too short a time, a beloved member of the Benedict Center team. Our thoughts are with his family as we share our gratitude for having known him.

Sisters Project Hits the Streets

In early 2010, the Benedict Center will reactivate the Sisters Project, an off-site street outreach initiative to intercept women involved with prostitution and drugs before they are arrested or grievously assaulted.

In response to neighborhood concerns about prostitution and attendant drug crimes, the Police and Community Prosecutors launched Operation Red Light, which targets areas that experience high levels of street prostitution. The Benedict Center's Sisters Project will be the front-line contact, inviting the women to come off the streets before being arrested and incarcerated.

The Sisters Project team encourages women to voluntarily participate in services available through a neighborhood drop-in site, the Benedict Center Women's Harm Reduction Program or other neighborhood programs.

This street outreach and diversion project is a collaborative effort to save women, many of whom are victims of poverty, neglect, sexual abuse and mental illness, from being lost to the streets. At the same time, the Sisters Project restores peace and normalcy to the neighborhoods that are most affected by prostitution.

Women who choose to leave the life of drugs and prostitution receive peer support from Sister Mentors, women who have "graduated" from the Benedict Center in the past. The program also engages the community through opportunities to participate in restorative justice peacemaking circles.

Marquette University Trinity Fellow Meagan Winn and Employment Coordinator Ben Pabich are already working with Third District Milwaukee Police and Community Prosecutors in the Lisbon Avenue Neighborhood area. After full implementation, Operation Red Light and the Sisters Project will also include North Avenue and Avenues West Neighborhoods.

Funding for the Benedict Center's portion of this collaborative project is a federal appropriation of \$100,000 secured by Congresswomen Gwen Moore, representing Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District.

The Sisters Project is an integral part of the Benedict Center's holistic, gender-responsive Women's Harm Reduction Program that benefits women in conflict with the law at the Benedict Center.

--Lindsey Paulsen

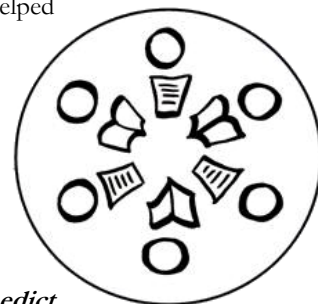
Sudden Death to Jail Libraries Spares Popular Book Groups

Providing no reason for the decision, Sheriff Clarke closed the Correctional Facility Central (Jail) Library November 1, and library operations at the Correctional Facility South (House of Correction) will cease December 31.

The closings caught the Benedict Center and librarians by surprise. The Benedict Center created the jail library in 1992 when the jail opened, after years of pushing a book cart through the old jail in the Safety Building, and worked with administrators at the House of Correction to create a bright and spacious library in former administrative office space.

Ellen Pellegrin established and ran the jail library for the Benedict Center until her retirement seven years ago, when Eric Beaumont joined the staff to manage the library. At the South facility, Sue Harrington started the library for the Benedict Center, ultimately contracting on her own to manage the library and oversee inmate workers who diligently worked in the library and helped dorm residents select books biweekly.

The former library space at both facilities has been emptied of purchased and donated collections exceeding 18,000 titles. Books have been shifted to locked rooms on jail housing pods and shelving in the dorms at the South facility.



Although there is no longer a library at the jail, Benedict Center, volunteer Elizabeth Vogt continues to keep inmates reading.

Vogt initiated the Jail Book Club (JBC) in 2008, through which reading, discussion and writing about literature creates the basis for shared ideas and multiple perspectives. With authors as diverse as Nelson Mandela, George Orwell and Khaled Hosseini, the ever-evolving groups delve into historical works, fiction, and satire.

"Discussions at the JBC, frankly, easily rival those in my ladies' book club on the outside," Vogt says. "We debate the conflicts of individual and collective interests, the overwhelming nature of many challenges in life and how similar human issues are around the world. We talk about the strange and dramatic turns that the paths of life can take – leading to delight as well as disaster. These JBC discussions can be profound or profane, sometimes humorous – but are always interesting!"

Vogt is considering creating a network via newsletter or Internet to keep the conversation going after inmates leave. Additional volunteers are leading groups as the JBC stretches to a goal of a club in every housing pod. Volunteer Janet Martin offers unintimidating, one-to-one discussion in another version of the JBC. For more information or to volunteer for the JBC, contact Mary Pat Utech at 414-347-1774 x 205 or mutech@benedictcenter.org.

Friends Benefit Truly Benefits

At this fall's **Friends of the Benedict Center Dinner and Auction**, District Attorney John Chisholm headlined the program with his straight talk about budget shortfalls and the consequent threat to second chance opportunities for low-level offenders. He is directly involved in providing many of those opportunities through Community Prosecution, Treatment Alternatives, Diversion and the Drug Treatment Court. His office has deferred more than 125 women to the Benedict Center rather than jail this year alone.

Guests at the dinner also starred, raising 13,000 through the dinner, silent auction and live auction conducted by media master Joel McNally.

Visit to Holy Hill Provides Quiet Retreat from the City



"I feel blessed to be here. It has been so good for my soul and my heart. I will never forget this trip."

-- Joyce



Jail Chaplain Overcomes Funding Shortfall

Since its founding in 1974, the Benedict Center has supported the interfaith ministry of a chaplain in the Milwaukee County Jail, but major funders disappeared a few years ago. This fall funds ran out and put Chaplain Catherine Sidney on temporary layoff. After six weeks, she returned to her overloaded schedule in the jail thanks to the efforts of Sheriff's Department Inspectors Kevin Carr and Richard Schmidt.

Chaplain Sidney helps screen and orient nearly 200 jail volunteers and handles all the scheduling and monitoring. She maintains harmony among volunteers and chaplains of diverse beliefs and ensures all housing units

have access to religious services, prayer, counseling, Bible study and religious materials, including the Qur'an. Additionally, Sidney prepares reports, speaks to churches and community groups, serves as liaison with community pastors – and she still finds time to counsel more than 2,500 inmates a year.

Sidney's work assists deputies and corrections officers manage the inmate population by offering them the means to reflect and find inner peace and spirituality at a very low point in their lives. Her work became especially important recently, with the resignation of Inmate Program Manager Jan Brylow .

Sidney also assists Anne Luber, who coordinates the Benedict Center Jail Visiting Program. Luber brings carolers and small remembrances to the inmates for the holidays.

The Jail Chaplain Program provides humane, compassionate and nonjudgmental counseling and religious services for inmates at the Milwaukee County Jail and represents the spiritual circle that interlocks direct service and advocacy for systemic change to complete the triad focus of the Benedict Center mission.

For more information, please visit our website at www.benedictcenter.org.

Holiday Heroes Ensure a Season of Celebration

The holidays have been brightened considerably for women at the Benedict Center as they have been blessed with special gifts that many of us take for granted. A bountiful turkey dinner, the traditional performance of *A Christmas Carol* at the Rep, gifts to share love and special wishes—even a warm coat or sturdy pair of shoes to cope with Wisconsin’s winter weather.

Turkey for Ten

Ten lucky ladies found an additional reason to be thankful this year through a gift from radio station **WMCS 1290 AM**. Raffle winners took home a frozen turkey with all the trimmings to celebrate Thanksgiving. The spirit of generosity and care that is so much a part of the Benedict Center family was underscored by the action of one winner, who made a gift of her turkey when she saw tears in the eyes of her friend who feared her family would go without Thanksgiving dinner this year.

Not a Scrooge in Sight

There is no tradition more hallowed in Milwaukee than the annual presentation of *A Christmas Carol* by the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. Made possible by a grant from Patty and Jay Baker, 30 tickets were donated for Benedict Center women and their families for the performance on the day after Thanksgiving.



In the spirit of friendship that permeates the Benedict Center, Sheila (left) gives her Thanksgiving dinner to her friend Chlanada.

A Wish Come True

Cardinal Stritch Urban Fellow **Kate Gilge** nominated the Benedict Center for the **Student Government Association’s** semi-annual charitable contribution, raising more than \$400 that was used to purchase wish list items – from backpacks to coffee.

A Gift under Every Tree

Northwestern Mutual employees are fulfilling all 75 requests for the Giving Tree at the Benedict Center this year. Sponsored annually by the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee, the Giving Tree provides each woman at the Benedict Center with a gift for herself or her children. For some, this may be the only gift they receive. The gifts will be distributed at the December awards ceremony and holiday celebration.

And a Stove in Every Kitchen

Thanks to a generous grant from the **Faye McBeath Foundation**, the Benedict Center kitchen will have a stove in time for the New Year. With a full-equipped kitchen, the Center can partner with Feeding America (Second Harvest) to maintain food in the pantry for women to prepare hot, nutritional breakfasts and lunches on site and hold nutrition and cooking classes. In addition to the stove, the Foundation is helping meet critical needs, as basic and important as emergency housing and bus tickets, for women working hard to create crime-free lives.

-- Peggy MacArthur



The Christmas tree is adorned for Thanksgiving, with photos of Benedict Center women and staff with their notes of gratitude for what each is thankful.

Rational Justice is a publication of the Benedict Center.

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MacArthur Manages More than Grants



As the design of this newsletter attests, Peggy MacArthur is adeptly managing more than grants in her third month as the Benedict Center’s new Grants Manager. MacArthur most recently served as Senior Writer for Advancement at Marquette University. Prior to that she managed a series of grant responsibilities at the Milwaukee Art Museum, culminating as Director of Grants and Restricted Gifts.

Her resume also includes design and marketing experience with Robert W. Baird & Co. Her marketing skills impressed Board members on the screening committee when she presented a bound folio representing a wide variety of her communications skills.

“Peggy immediately meshed with the mission and culture of the Benedict Center. Her extensive creative skills and enthusiastic collaboration contribute significant strength to our goal of sustaining the vital work of this small but mighty agency for justice,” Executive Director Kit Murphy McNally said.



Benedict Center

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And a special thank you to all of our friends, volunteers and donors who make all that we do at the Benedict Center possible.

CALENDAR



January 28

Friends of the Benedict Center Winter Luncheon, University Club Library, featuring Audrey Skierawski, Commission on Domestic Violence.

The last Thursday of every month

Women's Program Awards Luncheon at noon at the Benedict Center, open to guests.

May 11

Annual Awards Luncheon and Workshop, beginning at 9 a.m. with lunch at noon, Marquette University Alumni Memorial Union.

Please feel free to attend any monthly awards celebration you wish. It is really rewarding to see and hear firsthand what Benedict Center women are

accomplishing. For more information, check our website at www.benedictcenter.org or con-