

Witness to Innocence Conversation 2.9.22

Present: Tricia, Randal, Cara, Tyler, Beth HK, Susan

Problem: lack of support (private or public) for death row exonerated older adults

Actions: Peer Specialist position

Randal (Peer Specialist) continues to be a valued asset. He is trusted by the members and reduces work load of Cara (social worker). They hope to add a family peer specialist in the coming year. Very pleased that the UN increased their grant and they got another one for companion pet care. Happy to be planning the first in-person gathering in Gettysburg at the end of March after 5 postponements (with vaccine requirement per Innocence Network standard).

Randal often connects with members 1-4 times a month, with the preferred means by phone. All have the equipment and ability to do zoom, which is used for speaking engagements. Monthly town hall meetings are by conference call (their choice). The companionship is highly appreciated, especially during this prolonged pandemic isolation. Cara follows up when there are social work needs.

Five members have aged up into the older adult cohort, with 2 more soon to follow. 11 more in the network were recently designated as eligible and there is a waiting list of 20. Demographic data will be provided in the written report. This led to discussion about the difficult choices of continuing multiple services for a small number vs fewer services to more, or time-limiting. 6 other partners in the Innocence Network have now added social workers to their legal services organizations for limited services. Hiring another social worker would facilitate in-time-zone support. Small group meetings were suggested as a way of building peer support and efficient connection for those who are stable for the long term.

There is little funding for this work, so it is hard to envision a sustainability or growth plan. Efforts are being made nationally to end the death penalty and secure public support for members (such as Social Security, Medicare or program grants). Funding from FFA has provided critical support for the full-time Peer Specialist position.