

Debbie's Testimony

Hello, my name is Debbie. I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ who celebrates recovery from the love of money, physical and sexual abuse. Today, I struggle with finding balance after being incarcerated for nearly 7 years. It is an honor and privilege to represent the incarcerated woman of Oklahoma where we have maintained the highest rate of incarceration in the nation for more than a decade. Last month, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy reported that Oklahoma's female incarceration rate is even the highest in the world.

I have never been proud of my representation of these facts. I am however proud to represent My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and what He has shown me through Celebrate Recovery. I was one of the first participants at the Eddie Warrior Correctional Center who experienced much emotional freedom and healing as the Celebrate Recovery Inside team lead me and approximately 100 other ladies through the 12-step study. I then had the privilege of being a co-facilitator for the next group of ladies attending the 2nd Celebrate Recovery Program.

Today, the women from the Turley Residential Center have the privilege of participating in Celebrate Recovery at Southern Hills Baptist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma as they are transported by the Inside Team. Everyone wears T-shirts these days. In prison, we had to wear shirts that said inmate or offender. In Celebrate Recovery, I learned it doesn't matter what your T-shirt says, it's what's inside that counts. The number of repeat offenders will continue to increase unless there are genuine heart changes in the lives of the woman of Oklahoma. Many ladies do not know how to change the learned behavioral survival methods of their addictions that have crippled their lives for so long.

Celebrate Recovery provided for me an alternative by

offering genuine love and acceptance as well as a safe place for healing from all the years of hurt and pain that I had carried for nearly all my life. On my forth letter written to the Oklahoma Parole Board requesting early parole, I included my experience and life change as a participant in Celebrate Recovery. This year, it was granted and I was released two months ago 3 years early. I now get to experience life from the inside/out. The "free" world moves a lot faster than the life prison has to offer. I'm glad I learned while completing the 12 steps how important it is to reach out for help. Reintegration into society has been overwhelming at times, especially in operating that thing everyone uses called the cell phone.

I am very grateful for the Celebrate Recovery Inside/Out team members who have helped find clothing, safe and affordable housing alternatives, employment opportunity leads, transportation needs, and community support. They have been positive spiritual role models and continue to uphold the highest standard of integrity.

Together as we Celebrate Recovery, we can be part of the team that changes the number one ranking that Oklahoma has held for way too long. Won't you please join me with fulfilling my heart's desire to help those returning to society as I follow the words of Jesus found in Matt. 25: 35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."?

We are often, broken hurting people that so need your acceptance. Many being released have no family left who will support them even emotionally, let alone a place they can call home. Will you please leave God's light on for us? Thank you.



Debbie shares her testimony at Southern Hills Baptist Church, Tulsa, OK, Nov 2010

A letter to John Baker

By Antonio

When I started your course, I was looking only to get a piece of paper in my jacket, but after a few sessions of Celebrate Recovery, I started to change my mind. After hearing these men tell how they messed up their lives and God delivered them and changed them through Jesus Christ, I couldn't help but envy them. They seem so happy and unafraid to talk about their mistakes and about "serenity" in Jesus. There are a lot of men in here who do all kinds of things when they were in the free world, but amazingly become religious when they get in here. I have seen a lot of free world men come in here and tell us what we're missing on the outside and brag about all their stuff, but your counselors teach us the Bible and brag on Jesus! They have helped me realize that I was in my own prison before I ever came to this prison. I was successful in the free world, with a business, and two houses, and cars and boats, but I turned to drugs because I wasn't happy. I see that now. My thinking was sad and sour and my actions followed. It wasn't drugs that messed me up. Me messed me up. I wasn't brought up in church and I know little about the Bible. But I am getting closer to God and I gave my heart to Jesus and happiness and hope have started to grow in me. Thank you for these lessons and please continue to send guys like these back into this place that I used to say was "God-forsaken" but now I know better.

An Inside Leader's Perspective

First, I wanted everyone to know that Celebrate Recovery on the Inside here at the Jamestown California prison facility is alive and well. Our waiting list for CR continues to grow as those of us working the program find hope and answers to the difficulties of life both on the inside and outside. We have witnessed a real increase of men finally serious about changing their lives. I continue to hear my brothers express their willingness to do whatever it takes to change, and gain back a purposeful life, free from drugs and alcohol. That's truly exciting.

It's a good thing when I say that I work very hard as the Ministry Leader to keep a steady pace helping to coordinate groups and help train leaders to keep up with the growing ministry inside. We are at capacity in both our large group and step-study groups, accommodating as many participants as we can into our Chapel and visiting room, without it becoming non-productive due to the noise level.

As Ministry Leader on the minimum custody facility for the past 3 ½ years and a participant of CR going on 5, I have witnessed a lot of guys come and go, heard their stories and witnessed both their pain and their breakthroughs. In all this, I too have had the opportunity to grow and find answers to my own issues. Isn't it interesting how we all grow so differently? One may just be starting out and have a breakthrough in an area that you are still struggling with, even though you've been in recovery for a significantly longer time. I think what CR Inside offers most is frank and honest discussion, questions and answers, coming from someone else wearing prison blues just like you. Similar backgrounds aid in promoting an attentive group. Thus bring about a more productive session.

Furthermore, CR Inside offers a Christ-centered recovery to men who would otherwise have little or no exposure to effective biblical recovery group dynamics. CR Inside offers a convenient place and time for men who otherwise would not seek out recovery, especially when our addiction and lack of self-discipline has kept us from recovery on the outside. Incarceration, unfortunately is the only time that some participants experience the moment of clarity necessary to stop and examine our lives for the dysfunctional delusions they've become.

On the bright side, I can't tell you how many times men have stopped and mistakenly thanked me for making this program available to them. It's available at a time where otherwise we would just vacillate, waiting for time to pass until our day arrives to parole, thus beginning the whole insanity cycle all over again.

As for the Christ-centered part of the

program, I just can't say enough. As a born again Christian, I believe that all man's problems begin with the spirit. Therefore; a Christ-centered program is paramount. A Christ based program addresses the root of our problems and does not simply go for the superficial quick-fix often based on a person's will power, or staying locked away in a program for life.

Rather, CR Inside offers practical applications combined with spiritual awareness and dedication, teaching true surrender and openness to God and His principles. Thus, allowing Him to do the spiritual surgery necessary to cut away deep rooted character defects. CR offers us a complete deliverance from our hurts, habits and hang-ups wherein we are not taught will power for recovery but God's power for recovery and victory. It is my humble opinion that God would not have us spend the rest of our life afraid of a chemical, liquid or herb, but rather teach, nurture and offer a better way of living. The temptations may come, but we will find a more powerful fulfilling presence of Him working within us.

God uses CR to show us His more attractive desirable choice, that when compared to our past addictive life, puts everything into clear perspective, thus making the right choice simple and obvious for us to follow.

CR is truly the best recovery program offered at Jamestown as a clear avenue to receive answers, ideas and constructive input on staying out of prison as well as dealing with matters of the heart, soul and spirit. The transformation that CR provides to any participant who truly works the program and dedicates their life and will over to God, will carry over with them for the rest of tier lives no matter where they go. I know, because they continue to stay in touch long after they've paroled and connected to their local CR's outside. Thank you for welcoming them.



Lea Ann's Testimony

My name is Lea Ann, I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ, who celebrates recovery from a methamphetamine addiction, and currently struggles with co-dependency, guilt and the repercussions of my addiction with regards to my relationship with my family.

Recently, I had the privilege of being able to attend a Celebrate Recovery One Day. To many, that may not seem too big of a deal, but it was...you see, I am currently incarcerated, and have been for the past four years. Being able to attend was amazing, but even more amazing, was being able to share at the One Day "Inside" Lunch.

I was first introduced to CR Inside at a women's minimum security prison here in Oklahoma, where I started a step study. I was then transferred to a lower security facility where Inside volunteers pick us up, and transport us to CR meetings on the "outside". It was there that the real "me" was brought back. I had been incarcerated two times in the past, and walked out with nothing. The third time has been what changed my life. Thanks to the CR Inside team, I now have a home church and also have become a CR leader at both CR groups I attend. Jesus was waiting for me...all I had to do was let Him in.

Speaking at the luncheon made me realize that I am making a difference; I felt like it was where I belonged. I can't wait for another chance to share...the feeling I had afterwards was indescribable. It felt so good to know that what I have been doing is what Jesus was waiting on me to open my heart to do. I know in my heart that Jesus Christ and Celebrate Recovery are what were missing from my life, and I have them both now. Thank you CRI.



Addiction to a Risk-taking lifestyle

By Alonzo

Both my parents were alcoholics and my Mom left when I was nine years old, leaving my Dad and me to look after my three younger sisters. I remember moving a lot, and this in itself caused me a lot of problems. It meant that I got in a lot of fights. Children can be mean and most of my fights were usually due to some kid making fun of how I was dressed or smelled or one of my sisters. I learned early that by fighting, not being afraid to fight and get hurt, will win me some friends. Not the kind of friends I would choose today, but misfits like me, but at least people I could hang out with and feel a part of something. We learned that by being tough and taking chances, we would at least be feared, if not liked. People left us alone, were afraid of us and in some twisted way that felt good to me.

I got a thrill of finding out where a policeman lived, because I knew there would be guns there, guns that I could steal and sell lots of money. I enjoyed not only the money but the thrill and the way guys talked about me. By the time I was 15, I had jumped from bridges, rode a motorcycle over 100 mph, kicked in people's doors and burglarized homes and businesses, and robbed drug dealers. I was arrested at 18 for robbery and assault and served 9 years. Prison didn't change me that time; only made me worse. I came out meaner, feeling like I was the victim of society, not vice versa. In just a few months, after a bunch of assaults and robberies, I was arrested and sent back to prison. I did 11 years and 9 months and got parole.

This time I was ready to be different. I spent my time trying to be a better person and I did, but I did not eliminate all my character defects. I got out, fell in love with a good woman, married, worked two jobs to buy a house and raise our 2 kids as a responsible adult. But I still drank some, and then more, and then I started on drugs. My wife and I got into an argument, I left home to cool off, did some drugs, and broke into a car and stole junk, nothing but junk. I was arrested a few days later and sentenced to 20 years. I go up for parole next year. I've got one last chance. I can't count on anything but God. I've messed up again and again. I am 51 years old and have been in prison 25 years. I wish I had got into Celebrate Recovery 35 years ago...even ten years ago.



CELEBRATE RECOVERY INSIDE

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STANDING ROOM ONLY AT ONE DAY LUNCH

For those who were interested in learning about prison ministry, or learning more, the One Day Lunch this past October in Tulsa Oklahoma provided a great opportunity. Given the limited time for lunch during a One Day, it nevertheless succeeded in presenting the aspects of taking Celebrate Recovery into prisons and jails with status reports, testimonials, photo and video presentations, and goals for the future.

There were 160 seated while another 30 or so stood around the perimeter of the room designated for the lunch. "This is everything we hoped for, considering there are empty tables in the next room" said Cyndi Clark, CR Inside Team Leader, who organized and emceed the lunch. After welcoming the attendees, Cyndi introduced Hector Lozano, National Director, who in turn introduced Oklahoma State Reps, and briefly addressed the group; wanting instead to give time to those who are "in the trenches", volunteers who are giving back after incarceration, and those inside who are helping to carry the message of hope and healing through Celebrate Recovery and a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

The first two mini-testimonies were delivered by Debra and Lea Ann, two inmates (yes, inmates!) who received special permission to attend. They are both at a work-release facility, which allows them to be picked up, along with other women, to attend CR at Southern Hills Baptist Church (SHBC) and First United Methodist Church (FUMC), both in Tulsa. Lea Ann and Debra attend regularly, have completed a step study at their facility, and are demonstrating growth by taking part in leadership modules and monthly leadership trainings at SHBC. Lea Ann leads a step study inside, and open share at FUMC, while Debra will be leading the next step study.

The next presenter was Rick Cargill, who described how blessed he was to be introduced to CR while incarcerated, and who has been released and now is giving

back as an Inside volunteer. Lastly, was Debbie Davis, another person who is gratefully repaying what was so freely given to her...the love and fellowship of caring believers. Her story is inspirational, and her mini-testimony can be read elsewhere in this issue, as can that of Debra. Please look for them, they will first appear on the home page, then migrate to "testimonies". Debbie is now helping other women to successfully transition from incarceration to inclusion. It is that transitioning that National leadership has been increasingly looking to target, recognizing the challenges that recently released men and women face; and recognizing our call as Christ followers to surround them with support, guidance, and accountability. Some Inside ministries are labeling this "CR Inside/Out". David Jones (CRI State Rep OK) describes the difference this way: "While CR Inside takes one program to many inmates, Inside/Out takes one (released) inmate to many programs". This would include housing, furniture, transportation, job search, CR and church participation. With that in mind, Hector designated and introduced the newest State Rep for Oklahoma, Dee Ann Watford, who will pursue the vision of "Inside/Out". "We are looking for, and praying about ways in which we can encourage other State Reps to also be prayerful and mindful towards implementing teams to focus on re-integration and assimilation" declares Hector, "This has been an area that has been lacking for many released individuals, and the challenges are overwhelming... unfortunately sometimes too overwhelming, and disappointments lead to distress and isolation, which often end up in relapse and re-incarceration". So true.

The next goal in Oklahoma is hosting CR Inside Regional Meeting (South-Central), and CR Inside One Day Seminar this Spring. We encourage everyone reading this with a heart for the incarcerated to consider how you might be instrumental in helping to plan a CRI One Day in your state. Contact us at the newsletter, or Hector. "The harvest is great, but the workers are few".

