

WELCOME TO FFLIC'S
BI-MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER!

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- Learn more about FFLIC's current work
- Check out the awards and accolades FFLIC members are earning!
- Learn about FFLIC's work in Lake Charles!

INSIDE THIS
ISSUE:

Member
Spotlight 2

Director's
Message Pt. 2 2

Upcoming
Events 3

The People's
Data Campaign 3

FFLIC is Hir-
ing! 3

Congratula-
tions! 4

FFLIC's mis-
sion 6

Contact In-
formation 6

Families & Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children



AUGUST 2014

State of Emergency: Juvenile Reform

By Ernest Johnson

This year is the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer and commemorations have occurred across the country, from Mississippi to New Orleans. I have been thinking about how far as a country we have come, and how far we still have to go. It feels like a moment to reflect on the courage of our elders and the strength and stamina of those who continue to fight for civil and human rights.

This summer, I also experienced the re-incarceration of my son, Ernest Cloud. Ernest was released from juvenile



incarceration two years ago when Judge Mark Doherty ruled he had served his plea, which included the stipulation that he attend vocational training while incarcerated. He was sent to Bridge City in 2009. He is now being sent back to finish his sentence after the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled that he did not take advantage of vocational

opportunities which the Bridge City facility did not offer.

Ernest has been fighting this legal battle since he was released. The Supreme Court, in their decision this summer, reversed the decisions of two lower courts, both of which agreed that Ernest had fulfilled his plea agreement. These decisions were not sufficient; the prosecution continued to appeal, refusing to allow Ernest to re-start his life and try to build something positive. In her Supreme Court dissent, Judge Bernadette Johnson—Louisiana's first black Chief Justice—said the ruling was bordering on unconstitutional.

Continued on page 5

Message from the Director, Gina Womack



Dear Parents, Friends, Supporters, and Youth,

Welcome to the August edition of FFLIC's bi-monthly newsletter.

I write this letter at a moment of tragedy in our country. We here at FFLIC, and across the nation, are deeply saddened by the murder of Michael Brown at the hands of the police in Ferguson and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and the community. His

death is but the tip of the iceberg of the brutality against black and brown people at the hands of law enforcement in our country. We must keep in mind that our fight does not begin and end with police killing; our system continues to treat our families and communities with the utmost disrespect and disregard. We are pushed out of schools and denied educational opportunities and we continue to be overrepresented in prisons, all in a country that was built on our backs. Everywhere you turn there is money being made off the labor of poor people of color and when

we rise up and speak out about the continued injustice, millions of dollars are spent to keep us in check. As Rev. Al Sharpton recently pointed out, if the system can afford to bring in paramilitary forces to maintain order in a community crying out in pain, why can't the same amount of resources be invested in our communities through more community based programs, living wage jobs and affordable housing? Let us not condemn these black men, blaming them for their own deaths, and let us not condemn our children and families; instead let us continue to fight for justice in Ferguson and in all of our communities. *Continued on p. 2.*

Member Spotlight: Pastor Gladys



FFLIC is honored and excited to announce that Pastor Gladys of Lake Charles is our August Member of the Month!

Pastor Gladys first became involved with FFLIC six years ago and she has worked to

support incarcerated young people in Lake Charles for long-

er than that. She says that many people she knows cannot attend meetings because they're single parents or work multiple jobs, so she gets the information they need and then brings it back to her congregation and her community.

She is the Pastor of the Oasis Mercy Seat Family Church and also runs Oasis International Outreach. She

says that when she joined FFLIC, she realized that she needed to connect people to each other in order to create positive change. "Sometimes we think problems are only happening in our own community, but actually they're happening all over. We have to connect and collaborate," she says.

Continued on page 4

If one day our own child suddenly found themselves entrenched in the prison industrial complex would the progress that has been made in the reform of our Juvenile Justice system be "good enough"?

Message from the director cont.

While on a flight to Portland, OR for a recent Dignity in Schools convening, I took a rare moment to enjoy *Oprah Magazine*. I ran across Oprah's book reading recommendations and I started beating myself up when I tried to recall the last book I completed. When I read about a book titled "March", described as a new take on the civil rights movement by one of its heroes, I realized that I am *living* inside of the civil rights movement and I am blessed to hear from heroes every day as they struggle with living with a son or daughter that is locked away from home in a cage called a prison cell or with changing schools for the second or third time last school year because their child doesn't "fit" into the various charter school boxes. I continued to think, as I read the description, about how Martin Luther King Jr.'s role in a "seminal civil rights boycott" helped inspire Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) to join the movement and I couldn't help but think that if more people could actually hear the stories of our families, if we really listened to the plight of young people, if we saw ourselves

in the homeless, if we really had to fight daily for basic human rights for ourselves and our children, would it inspire all of us to join in this continued fight for "Human Rights?"

If one day our own child or a close relative suddenly found themselves entrenched in the prison industrial complex would the progress that has been made in the reform of our Juvenile Justice system be "good enough"? If those of us who are able to pay for an education for our children or those of us who are blessed enough to be in the school of our choice suddenly had to endure a "D" or "F" school would this education reform experiment still be so wonderful?

Oprah Magazine also featured an article on 20 questions to ask ourselves. The questions I just asked should be on the top of the list. If we stepped outside of ourselves for a minute and into this book that I'm living in, would we be so judgmental about poverty and the decisions people make in order to maintain dignity and survive? Maybe if we took the time to listen, have empathy, give more time to work

with children and adults, and give encouragement instead of criticism, the world would be a better place. If we could see our state/federal budgets going for the greater good instead of lining someone's pockets, I wonder what kind of world this would be.

There is still an immense amount of work to be done in the country and here in New Orleans and we must continue to demand change. Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson, but Marshall Coulter was shot here, Henry Glover was shot here, countless black bodies are shot and killed here every month, and countless more are sent away to be forgotten behind bars. We must remember their humanity and we must fight for their futures and for all of our futures.

As you read in this newsletter about all the incredible work FFLIC has been doing, please keep in mind that FFLIC's backbone is you: our supporters, families, friends, and clients. It is you who make us strong and keep us fighting despite an atmosphere in this country that fosters situations like that in Ferguson—or that here in Louisiana.

Yours in Solidarity,

Gina Womack

Upcoming Events



Don't miss FFLIC's 5th Annual Run/Walk for Juvenile Justice!

FFLIC Community Conference Call, August 28th Contact FFLIC to hear more about current campaigns and share your opinions and experiences!

Night Out Against Crime, October 14th FFLIC will join other New Orleans organiza-

tions to promote a safe city for ALL residents.

Dignity in Schools Week of Action, October 8-11th Support a moratorium on suspensions and expulsions! End the school-to-prison pipeline!

Juvenile Judge Forum, date TBA

There's an election coming up on Nov 4th. Make sure you attend FFLIC's judge forum so you can make an informed choice for juvenile court!

SAVE THE DATES!

FFLIC's Annual 5K Run for Juvenile Justice — October 18th

Statewide Membership Leadership Academy — December 6, 2014

ELECTION DAY! November 4th. Don't forget to vote!

Thanks to Loyola University!

FFLIC would like to thank Loyola University's Office of Community Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship for their work on behalf of FFLIC this year.

FFLIC was honored to be chosen as a partner for Loyola students, an in-kind contribution

worth over \$18,633.

You'll be seeing the results of this collaboration in our upcoming campaigns. Make sure you check FFLIC's website, twitter, and facebook to stay abreast of all the work we're doing.

In the words of Kelly Brotzman, Director of the Loyola office, "Through this partnership, our two institutions have demonstrated the importance of connecting teaching and learning in higher education to community needs."

We couldn't agree more.

The partnership represents an in-kind contribution worth over \$18,633!

FFLIC is Hiring!

FFLIC is thrilled to announce that we are hiring for 2 part time positions! We would love for YOU to join our team. Brief job descriptions are below; for more information or to apply, please visit our website.

Part-time Community Organizer: 20 hours/week: Must be knowledgeable and resourceful

regarding the juvenile justice system and school system in Louisiana

Part-time Donor Development and Communications

Coordinator: Help FFLIC raise money and communicate with donors to keep our work alive!

If you are interested in applying for either of these positions, please send resumes and cover letters to

Jesse.chanin@gmail.com. Visit <http://www.fflic.org/job-openings> to read the full postings and apply!



Congratulations!

CONGRATULATIONS



FFLIC is excited and honored to congratulate the following people on their recent successes!

- Organizer **ERNEST JOHNSON** won the Beth Arnovits Gutsy Youth Advocate Award! Who's the

gutsiest youth advocate you know? Ernest Johnson of @fflicla takes home NJJN's award #juvenilejustice

- FFLIC member and Gina Womack's daughter **JESSICA WOMACK** graduated from Dartmouth College!
- FFLIC Member **RASAAN ISON**, age 16, for winning a Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty Award! After an upsetting personal experience at his school, Rasaan dedi-

cated himself to organizing for change. Rasaan has been building a youth group in New Orleans organized around suspension and expulsion.

- **YOU!** FFLIC would love to recognize the work and accomplishments of our members! **Please send in announcements, birthdays, and awards for our next newsletter!**

Pastor Gladys, continued

Along with connecting parents, families, and communities across the state around issues of injustice and mass incarceration, Pastor Gladys meets regularly with youth and adults who are incarcerated at the Calcasieu Correctional Center and at the Calcasieu Juvenile Detention Center nearby. She often can visit inmates and offer them solace when their families cannot. "By me being a pastor, I can go. So a parent will call me and say 'Can you go visit my son?' and of course I will," she explains. At these facilities, she has counseled folks from all over Louisiana and also had the chance to hear their stories.

She says that they're not bad kids—they just need help. She tries to be a positive influence, giving them correct information, talking with them, and sometimes just listening. From these visits,

she has been able to use her insight and observations to help FFLIC in Lake Charles plan campaigns and fight for the safety and human rights of their children and communities.

"*The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few,*" she says, quoting from The Bible. "By this I mean: there are a lot of youth out there that need FFLIC's help, and other organizations' help, and we all need to come together to tackle that beast because it is a beast." She says that often FFLIC shows parents, families, and children a way to escape from their current situation and prevents them from being endlessly mired in the criminal justice system.

She also tries to raise awareness about mass incarceration, and especially the incarceration of juveniles in her community. She says that many people want to distance themselves from these issues but that she encourages them to instead face the



realities of criminalization head on. "People say—'Well, it's not my child' but then once it affects them, they get on board. I try to tell them, 'Don't let it get to your front door. Go out and tackle it!'"

Pastor Gladys works tirelessly not only for FFLIC, but also as a pastor and a leader in her community and her state. We are honored to celebrate her today!

Anyone who would like to get involved in the Lake Charles area can contact Pastor Gladys directly at gl_kin@yahoo.com or 337-419-5220. The public is also invited to attend her upcoming event: A Hip Hop Summit on Community Awareness – August 30th at 3pm at the McMillan Center.

State of Emergency, continued

She wrote, “The action of the majority undermines the very purpose of the plea agreement.” You can read her entire dissent [here](#). Additionally, Justice Weimer wrote in his dissent, “the court has re-written the defendant’s plea agreement to include a condition that the juvenile participate in a program never offered to him.”

Ernest would have loved to attend vocational programs while incarcerated at Bridge City. However, the facility only offers one program (culinary arts), with space for 6 students at a time. When Ernest entered Bridge City, there was already a 26-student waiting list. If the state is indeed moving toward a more holistic and skills-based model of juvenile incarceration, they certainly need to work to provide youth with more opportunities for positive development. Judge Doherty, in his original ruling, read through over 900 pages of testimony detailing the failure of the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) to provide any reasonable vocational or academic resources for Ernest. *The Advocate* has provided a [detailed summary of these arguments](#).

The 900 pages also document the widespread incompetence of the Office of Juvenile Justice. There is an unconstitutional lack of programming in all facilities. Staff are untrained and underpaid, and there is a high turnover rate. Staff have complained repeatedly about poor communication and lack of stable leadership. Families are stressed and confused about the status of their children and can’t get any answers from OJJ. One parent I work with stated her son had over 20 case workers in a 5 year period and no transition plan upon release. Another stated that family counseling was 10 minutes long and took place over the phone. Most often, I hear tales of parents who can’t visit their incarcerated children because they

live in Shreveport but their child is incarcerated in Bridge City, over 300 miles away. These issues put youth—including youth who genuinely want to change and get help—in jeopardy of getting further entrenched in the prison system instead of moving toward productive and safe futures.

OJJ just had a groundbreaking for a new facility in Bunkie and has detailed plans for a new one on the old Jetson site. Why are we building new facilities that will not have adequate programs for all children? Bricks and fences do not create adequate reform.

Less than an hour after the Supreme Court verdict, Ernest was back at Bridge City in a bed that had been waiting for him. Yet there are many other youth across the state held in detention centers for months waiting to get into OJJ custody. For some of them, their release date depends on how soon they can get a bed. Ernest was mandated to attend an 18 month vocational program while incarcerated—never mind that he had been attending vocational training while free, never mind that he had a new week-old son.

This is a stark example of a larger pattern in which we blame individuals for the failures of institutions. The institution did not provide vocational training but Ernest, who was 16 at the time of his original incarceration and has a diagnosed learning disability, finds the blame rests on him. He is the one who is punished; not the Bridge City directors, the adults who failed to provide his court-ordered services.

The recidivism rate is high and we blame individuals for a lack of morals instead of looking to the prisons and their failed programs of rehabilitation and safety. We look at the drop-out rate, or suspension rates, and we blame students for “not wanting to learn” instead of critiquing the schools that are not teaching them or engaging them or allowing them to flourish. We look at the unemployment rate,

or the welfare rolls, and we say, “those people are lazy” instead of demanding change in the inadequate training programs, the low minimum wage, the lack of affordable childcare, and the barriers to employment because of criminal offenses or lack of documentation.

Ernest is only one person, but he is symbolic of the failures of the juvenile justice system at large, which targets black boys from the outset. Black youth are disproportionately diagnosed with learning disabilities, suspended and expelled from schools, arrested by the police, and put in secure care facilities. Too many people use this as an excuse to focus blame on black culture and families. We want to believe we live in a fair society where everyone is allotted the same rights and freedoms, is promoted based on their merit, and is responsible for their individual actions.

However, just as the Jim Crow racism of 1964 is glaringly obvious to us now, so too will this institutional racism shine embarrassingly bright in the future. When we think of institutional and generational violence, we need look no further than to Ernest’s week-old son, who now will spend the first formative 2 years of his life denied his father by the state. The need for civil rights workers remains strong; we must demand and create institutions that meet the needs of all our families, regardless of race or class or gender. We must understand that our freedom and our accomplishments are inextricably linked to the freedom and accomplishments of our neighbors.

As we look back at the heroic work of Freedom Summer, I hope we also think of my son, Ernest Cloud, and all our friends, children, parents, and community members who will spend this summer, and many summers, unjustly behind bars.

“Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.” –Martin Luther King, Jr.

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

New Orleans Office

1600 Oretha C. Haley Blvd.

New Orleans, LA 70113

(504) 522-5437

(504) 522-5430 fax

www.ffc.org

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) is a statewide membership-based organization that fights for a better life for all of Louisiana's youth, especially those involved in or targeted by the juvenile justice system.

As mothers and fathers, grandparents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and allies we believe in and implement a model of organizing that is people and community centered, and is explicitly anti-racist.

We engage in education, community building, and leadership development advocacy through strategically chosen goals in order to empower individuals, families and communities to transform currently oppressive systems and institutions into ones that uphold justice for our families, to build strong, powerful families and communities and to fight for justice for our children and ourselves.

We believe that we are the "experts" on what our communities need and that solidarity and collective action are our most powerful tools in our struggle for self-determination and justice for our children and families.

Thank you to our funders who make our work possible:

A host of individual donors, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Carolyn W. and Charles T. Beard Family Foundation, Criminal Justice Initiative a project of the Solidago Foundation, Kerry Lobel and Marta Drury, Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, a donor advised fund of Horizons Foundation; Foundation for Louisiana, Marguerite Casey Foundation, The Schott Foundation for Public Education; Sparkplug Foundation; Tides Foundation, Youth Justice Funding Collaborative, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation

We appreciate you!

Support FFLIC!

There are many ways to support FFLIC's work and we appreciate all of our tireless volunteers, members, and employees!

Please consider becoming a member!

FFLIC is a member-driven organization and relies on the wisdom and energy of our members to guide our work. Whether you are a parent, relative, friend or ally, as a FFLIC member, you will get:

- FFLIC voting rights
- A support network
- Access to resources and training on how to advocate for your child and other children in the system

- A subscription to our newsletter, with updates on FFLIC activities and the reform effort, and information about important changes in the juvenile justice system and other issues that affect our communities.

**Membership is \$10/year
(financial assistance is available)**

Want to donate more?

Please consider becoming a monthly sustainer of FFLIC! For as little as \$5/month, you can ensure that FFLIC stays funded and can devote all of our energy to fighting for youth justice!



Visit our website to donate online or sign up to be a monthly sustainer. Every bit keeps us strong!

www.ffc.org