

WELCOME TO FFLIC'S
BI-MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER!

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- Learn more about FFLIC's current work
- Find legislation to watch in 2014
- Meet some of FFLIC's newest member-leaders!

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Families & Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children



APRIL 2014

FFLIC Highlights 10 New Leaders

FFLIC is a membership-based organization and its strength lies in the power and reach of its members. With that philosophy in mind, FFLIC recently trained 10 new "member-leaders" who will be role models not only in the organization but also in their own communities. Since we are the experts on our own experience, we must be the ones to lead the struggle to make sure ALL our children and families get justice.

The 10 member leaders went through FFLIC's "leadership trajectory training" in which



they learned more about the legal system and how to be a successful advocate for parents and families. They studied laws and bills, met other

folks who have had interactions with the juvenile justice system, and learned techniques for effectively

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Message from the Director, Gina Womack



**Dear Parents,
Friends, Sup-
porters, and
Youth,**

Welcome to the April edition of FFLIC's bi-monthly newsletter! I am very excited to tell you about the work we have been doing and to invite you to participate in our upcoming campaigns.

I especially want to highlight the incredible work done this winter by the 10 leaders highlighted in this newsletter. Not only have they struggled through their own experiences with the juvenile justice system, but they have also participated in FFLIC's leadership trajectory training, so that they can be leaders in their communities and help

others going through the same process. Families helping families and advocating for positive change—that's what FFLIC is all about. We are so proud of what they all have accomplished.

We would love for all of you to become equally involved in FFLIC's work. In that vein, I

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Member Spotlight: Troylynn Robertson



Congratulations to Troylynn Robertson who is FFLIC's member spotlight of this issue! Ms. Troy first became involved in FFLIC's work in 2010-2011 when her youngest

son became entangled in the justice system. Ms. Troy was connected to FFLIC through another organization and says that immediately, "I saw they cared about families going through the system and Mr. Johnson, the organizer, took me under his wing and gave me insight about how to fight and emotionally withstand the storm I was

going through." FFLIC helped Ms. Troy to understand the legal aspects of what was happening to her, helped her choose a lawyer, and briefed her on good questions to ask. Before she encountered FFLIC she said she felt very alone, like she was "on an island by myself," but the support of the organization helped her to stay strong.

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Message from the director continued

"Together, all our voices will demand change, and help ensure that every child in Louisiana has the chance to reach his or her potential."

would like you invite you to join us at our rally at the capitol to "Keep the Dream Alive: End the School to Prison Pipeline" on April 24th. We will be gathering with all our supporters in Baton Rouge to tell our legislators to support accountability in juvenile justice reform and make sure that our children are not funneled to prisons by broken school discipline systems and "zero tolerance" policies. If you can't join us on April 24th, please contact FFLIC to pledge your support as an individual or an organization. Together, all of our voices will demand change, and help ensure that every child in

Louisiana has the chance to reach his or her potential.

In addition, I want to remind you that there are many ways you can support FFLIC's work. If you are a child, parent, or advocate of a child going through the juvenile justice system, you can reach out to us to connect you to our members and community experts. If you have a school-age child, you can participate in our "People's Data Campaign" to collect information on state-wide discipline policies. You can donate to our efforts—monetarily, or through lending your time, by making Easter baskets for kids who otherwise wouldn't get

them, by helping drive folks without cars to our meetings, or by contacting your legislators around the issues we have outlined in this newsletter. Call us to find out how you can be a part of the struggle to keep our communities safe, our kids out of prison, and our lawmakers accountable.

Yours in solidarity,

Gina Womack

Upcoming Events



Easter Basket Give-a-way.

On April 16th, for the 6th year in a row, FFLIC distributed Easter Baskets to children the Kindergarten

and 1st grade classes at our partner school Edgar Pl. Harney Spirit of Excellence School in conjunction with our Positive Behavior Supports Initiative

Thank you to everyone who donated toys, books, candy and money as well as to the volunteers who came to our Easter basket making party. Also thank you to Blessed Trinity Church who hosted FFLIC families at an Easter egg hunt on Sunday, April 13 and donated 25 baskets.

Prison Pipeline, April 24th

Join FFLIC in Baton Rouge as we demand legislators stop the school-to-prison pipeline by ending unnecessarily punitive discipline processes.

Email gbwomack@fflic.org for more information.

FFLIC Member Meeting, May 22nd, 6-8pm

All are welcome to attend FFLIC's member meeting. Come learn about our current work and get involved!

Leadership Trajectory Training, June 2014

Stay tuned for more details about our upcoming June community leadership training!

People's Data Campaign

FFLIC is very excited to announce that we have started the **People's Data Campaign** to help us collect information about parent and student experiences with the discipline structures in their schools. This data will help us to decide which schools to focus on and how we can most effectively

disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline in Louisiana.

The People's Data Campaign is designed to deploy families, youth, and other concerned community members to conduct surveys and outreach by door knocking, walking the streets, outreach at malls, department stores, and schools,

and wherever we can, to collect stories.

We invite every person and organization to join this opportunity to have your voice heard and your story told.

Go to www.fflic.org/archives/1528 to share your story and contribute to our campaign!

Go to

www.fflic.org/archives/1528

to ensure that your story is included in our campaign!

Nissan Truth Tour

FFLIC is proud to have co-sponsored the Nissan Truth Tour, which came to the Ashe Cultural Arts Center. The event featured award-winning actor **Danny Glover** (*The Color Purple*), vocalist **Tonya Boyd Cannon**, and other local artists as Concerned Students for a Better Nissan presented

the Nissan Truth Tour featuring a night of live performances, spoken word, art, music, fashion and dance. This event was pegged as one that will expose the truth about Nissan workers' fight for justice at work, and social justice issues affecting our generation. Visit www.choosejustice.com for more information.

Gina and Mr. Johnson of FFLIC pose with Danny Glover at the Nissan Truth Tour event.



Legislation to Watch!

Keep an eye
on bills go-
ing through
Baton
Rouge!



- **HB Bill 777: Voice your support!** Provides alternatives to zero tolerance discipline policies, instead allowing for restorative justice initiatives. This bill can help keep vulnerable youth in school.
- **SB Bill 652: Voice your opposition!!!** The Classroom Protection Act which allows teachers to call law enforcement for students who haven't actually done anything.
- **HB 407: Voice your Support!** Will ensure that students who want be in school are allowed to attend.

Please call, email, or write to your House of Representatives member to voice your thoughts on these bills!

Troylynn Robertson, Continued

"When a child is incarcerated, the whole family is impacted, emotionally, financially, and spiritually."

As her son's case progressed, she started seeing other parents coming in with the same look, saying the same phrases, and feeling the same despair. She knew then that she wanted to help. Ms. Troy started by coming to FFLIC member meetings, doing outreach, going to the courthouse with Mr. Johnson, and talking to young people. Now, she serves on FFLIC's Board of Directors and is a key part of all organizational decisions.

She thinks people are drawn to FFLIC because it's a personal organization and it feels like a family. "FFLIC let me know which battles were worth

fighting," she says. "And they also helped me understand the transition my son—and I—would face when he came home." After three and a half years incarcerated, her son has indeed come home, and Ms. Troy has been there to support him, armed with the knowledge and resources she has gleaned from FFLIC. Her son is currently in classes, working toward his GED.

"The best thing about FFLIC," says Ms. Troy, "is that they're an organization that really cares about the whole family. When a child is incarcerated, the whole family is impacted, emotionally, financially, and spiritually."

FFLIC is so proud to have Troylynn Robertson as one of our members, and to see how she has used her own story to motivate her to fight for other children and other families. Congratulations and thank you Troylynn!

10 Leaders, Continued

communicating with youth, families, lawyers, judges, and politicians. The 10 leaders had a celebratory dinner in early April to discuss their successes and how they want to move forward in the future. Here are some of their reflections and ideas:

Ms. Valencia believes FFLIC's strength lies in what it stands for as an organization and the information and knowledge FFLIC communicates. "I have a young son myself," she says. "And FFLIC is helping not only me, but others too."

Mr. Eugene has been working on juvenile issues for a long time. He works with students at a K-8 school and also mentors troubled youth. He says he enjoyed the training because he learned a lot about how to organize and how to be a leader. He hopes to work on legislative issues and advocate for bills and laws that will help Louisiana's children.

Ms. Jackie, like many FFLIC members, became involved when she met Mr. Johnson. She appreciated the "family-way" FFLIC does everything and the different perspective they bring. "They're always there," she says, "and they always listen and help." Her goal as a FFLIC leader is to help families and children in crisis.

Mr. Wayne became involved

with FFLIC more recently. He is passionate about supporting juveniles in schools and hopes to work on reducing suspensions and expulsions in Louisiana. He says he was inspired to join FFLIC because of the special way they are able to console parents and also give them hope.

Mr. A.C. describes himself as an "ex-gangbanger from California." He's now committed to insuring that other youth don't go down the same path he stumbled into. "I see all these innocent kids getting caught in all this fantasy," he says. "I hope to assist families when they're going to court." He wants to use his experience with the justice system to help families learn how they can fight to get sentences dropped and get their children help and support instead of punishment.

Ms. Lillian became involved with FFLIC when her son was first incarcerated. "I felt lost as a june bug when my son got arrested," she says. She was lost and heart-broken and didn't know where to turn. That frustration and sadness has now been transformed into an energy to help as many other families as she can. "You have to nurture children," she says. "They sometimes go astray but they need guidance. And fami-

lies need guidance, too." Her goal is to open a family center to help underprivileged youth that includes a re-entry program.

Ms. Verna joined FFLIC in 2010 when her son had legal trouble and she was at a loss about what to do. That all changed when she met Mr. Johnson. Now, she is committed to changing the system entirely and generating compassion for families stuck in its grasp. "You don't realize what the kids and parents are going through until it happens to you," she explains. "All my FFLIC friends held my hand and now I can hold theirs. Folks need to have a heart toward those that are suffering." She believes that when a parent or a child goes before a judge, they often feel very alone, "but through FFLIC, they are supported and have strength."

***"You don't realize
what the kids and
parents are going
through until it
happens to you."***

—Ms. Verna

FFLIC's 10 Leaders Are:

Ms. Valencia Thomas

Mr. Eugene Dean

Ms. Jackie Smith

Mr. Wayne Scott

Mr. A.C. Haynes

Ms. Lillian Tillman

Ms. Shana Sears

Ms. Lynette Adams

Ms. Verna Carr

Ms. Shante Lockett

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

To see a list of the individuals and organizations that support FFLIC's work, please visit www.ffmpeg.org/home/our-supporters

Without them, this newsletter and all the work it documents would never be possible!

www.ffmpeg.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.

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.ffmpeg.org