



# CSOR

*Though I have fallen,  
I will rise. - Micah 7:8*

37<sup>th</sup> Edition

December 2022

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## THE MANY FACES OF THE ONGOING HOUSING CHALLENGE

### Are those coming out of DOC the only ones hurt?

As I work from day to day, hour to hour to help find housing for people coming out of the CDOC with our particular offense, I also think of those who have our offense, but perhaps never went to prison, because they had a misdemeanor or other lower-level offense. Many of them have lived in shelters and on the streets of Denver for years, sleeping on all-night buses or along the Platte River during both hot and cold seasons. A recent call from a case manager at a non-profit here in Denver disclosed that a man this person was working with has literally slept on the two Denver buses that ran all night for the last twenty years. These men (and a few women) have to live this way because many of them still have to register, as if they had a more serious offense. Helping someone get off the registry is challenging and is something that we at CSOR are addressing. We are working with an attorney who also leads a prominent non-profit organization in Denver to train a number of interested people who attended our housing summit, in how to help someone get off the registry. In reality, the moment that the general public hears the words "sex offender", it makes no difference what you actually did and whether you stopped doing it many years ago! Some of them are people who served their country and ended up in an FCI facility for many years and are now looking for a place to live once they get out and finish their time in a half-way house run by the government. I literally get letters from FCI men who are in facilities in other states who believe that they want to come to Colorado.

In a nutshell, there are a significant number of us who are constantly looking for housing opportunities for men and women coming out of CDOC. I also try to assist those who are on the streets, who want a home away from the Platte River or the shelters and all-night busses. It is very difficult work – there just aren't enough low rent places out here in the “real world” to care for all of our men and women who need this kind of support, specifically those who have our offense in their background. On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, a group of us met with an attorney who is also the leader of a prominent downtown non-profit, to learn how to help folks get off the registry. It is challenging work, and hopefully this attorney's expertise will assist us in getting our feet wet in this arena!

As you get ready to leave prison and look for housing, be aware that there are a variety of “models” of housing available for our men and women. Here is a list of the varieties:

- 1) Congregate housing, or what one might call “housing that accommodates larger numbers of people in a shared living setting”. This can also be called “transitional housing”, although stays in these environments frequently last longer than the typical definition for transitional housing which is 9 – 12 months. We have a couple of examples of these larger environments, where a significant number of folks end up staying for longer periods of time.
- 2) Smaller environment congregate housing is housing such as I provide. We have room for three people to live at our house. Time frames depend on a variety of issues: some men living with us need surgery and months of recovery. What is the person's financial ability to find a place of their own, and how quickly will they be able to reach a point to do that? How well have they adjusted to living in a small family environment with two dogs and a cat? How willing are you to assist with leave raking in the fall, and other small around the house tasks, considering that the rent is less than it is for most housing opportunities? Of course, these extra jobs are not required, but the help is much appreciated.
- 3) Transitional housing that houses 5 or so people for approximately 9 – 12 months. The goal here is to get a job, settle into the larger public arena, have money, and go get a place of your own. This allows others to take advantage of this style of living. As you become more able to support yourself in a different environment (easier said than done for most), options for living may become more available.

*“I have bipolar 2 disorder, anxiety disorder, and ADHD. I take my medications every day. I go to therapy every week. I hope, one day, I can be on the other side of therapy – you know, like the one who gets to write stuff down and shakes her head and listens.” — Emma Thomas, [Live for Me](#)*

Moving through these transitional steps, there is time to think and plan for an apartment of your own, perhaps a studio. These are hard to find, as you are now reaching out to “regular landlords” who may or may not allow our men and women to live in their housing environments, and whose housing you may not be able to afford.

## Is Getting Out All it's Cracked up to Be?

For those still in prison, getting through and getting out are paramount desires. Almost every letter I get speaks of wild dreams and goals for the future that will be accomplished once you get out and head for “freedom.” The question is – what does freedom look like for men and women who have been in prison? I am talking especially about the men and women who have been imprisoned for our particular offense(s).

In order to ensure, or to increase the chances that a person leaving prison will not re-offend, there are many steps to climb and corners to turn before you are trusted to be somewhat on your own. It doesn't take days or even months to get to a point where you can make your own decisions, and fully chase the dreams you had while you were inside. It takes years! It is not my purpose to say that ALL the requirements that pave the road for parolees are bad. It is my purpose to prepare you for the fact that the road is generally not paved with roses. This message is all too true for people who have gotten out of prison and gone back within a fairly short period of time. You have had a taste of what I am talking about.

My son got out of prison in 2009 – he entered prison in 2004. It would have been out in 2008, except that he slept through standing count, and got sent to Buena Vista for a year because he did that. He had a real problem with deep sleep and a number of men were supposed to make sure that he was woken up for standing count. They didn't do that on the day he was cuffed and taken away. He got out fairly soon after he returned to Arrowhead. It took him 8 or 9 years to finish treatment. That was after a rough start with Grieg Veeder's program, and thanks to parole, being released to attend RSA, but only after six months in RSA's SLA Program. Just FYI, RSA no longer has an SLA (Shared Living Arrangement) Program.

Needless to say, the next years (it took 8 years approximately) were tough in many ways: occasionally having trouble passing polygraphs, being chastised by treatment and parole supervision for doing his job – i.e. going to court with his employer who is an attorney, and having a D.A. figure out who he was (his offense was in Jeffco and the case for the firm he was working for (and still works for) , caused a “ruckus”. The D.A.’s remembered him from his own offense 8 -10 years before in Jeffco and felt he should not be accompanying his employer and helping him with this case which happened to be an S.O. case. He was and is still a paralegal and was doing his job. Crazy.

His parole officer and his therapist at that time gave him a “royal” scolding for doing such a thing as assisting the attorney with this case, and there was even brief talk of a revocation. That, thank God, did not happen.

My son finished RSA approximately eight years after this incident. The last two or three years he only went to class intermittently, which was a blessing and a gift, but it made it difficult to know his fellow classmates, and to be effectual in joining them in class. Fortunately, most people are getting through treatment a bit faster than that now. At that time, it was still considered crucial that treatment continue for a significant amount of time. To this day, some people will stay in treatment longer than others, depending on whether they are doing what the therapists feel is “good work” versus work that could have been better, and was meeting their criteria for successful completion.

Then there are the days and nights when you miss your family and friends on the outside (for those of you who are blessed enough to still have them). Writing a letter to your family at Christmastime because you are lonely for them, can land you back inside IF your victim(s) were family members.



You should be prepared for a number of years after you get out that will tax your desires and abilities to really pursue a life of your own. Depending on how you are able to adjust to treatment, your P.O., and the general stipulations that parole and treatment have for you, it may seem like another journey that you are not necessarily “wild” about. That is why it will make sense for you to prepare your mind BEFORE leaving prison for the fact that there is still a road that needs to be traveled with your P.O. and treatment provider before you launch off on your own! I am sure that some of you, if not most of you, will feel that this ‘extension” of “prison time” and intense learning time is way too much. However, it is what it is, and you will be most successful IF you come out prepared for an ongoing experience that centers around the offense that you committed, the people that you hurt, and the parole officers and treatment providers that will have a significant handle on your life for a number of years.

### NEWS TIDBITS

1. While our Housing Summit went well this summer, the follow-up and movement forward is always a challenge. People left the meeting excited about possibilities regarding better housing opportunities for our men and women coming out of CDOC, FCI Englewood, and off the streets of Denver. Yes all three groups have to register, and in order to improve the possibilities of them finding housing, the registry at some point, has to “go away”, if not across the country, at least for individuals. In an attempt to get people willing to work on helping folks get off the registry, we held a post summit meeting of a much smaller group of folk that were interested enough in helping with this that we could get a small Zoom and in-person meeting together to learn more. Julie Kiehl, the Executive Director of Empowerment here in Denver, agreed to chair this small committee in terms of teaching them how to fill out the appropriate forms or helping them to do so. Except for me having car problems and being late for the meeting, it went well. I will be reviewing the forms as I have a few moments to do so. The group will be meeting again! This is the first attempt I am aware of since Maureen Cain’s try at getting people off the registry through a grant a number of years ago!

2. Another group is meeting since the Housing Summit of the summer. It is a landlord's group. There are four of us meeting on a regular basis once a month or so to discuss landlord issues for those of us providing housing for people getting out of facilities. One party in the group has two houses that can hold 5 – 7 a piece; another has 3 houses that can hold 5; the third landlord is me and I can handle 3 people in my private home; and the fourth landlord has a house and apartments which are available in Longmont. All of the others above are in the Denver area.
  
3. It is my goal to reach out to a significant number of churches across Colorado, to see whether they would a) be open to education regarding our population, and b) consider what opportunities they might consider in terms of being a part of supplying or creating house for our men and women coming out of DOC with our particular offense. This has been a goal of mine for the last several years, as CSOR applied for a grant that we did not get but had that same goal in mind as one of the grant's objectives. Because the beginning of such a model is working out well for one man and a couple from Bear Valley Church in Denver (my church), I would like to further explore similar options across the state in terms of ways that churches might be willing to be involved with our men and women.
  
4. I received word recently that, at this moment, the only DORA (Department of Regulatory Agencies) suggested change was that there be no limit on the number of providers that a person could choose from. In other words, people could make their own choices out of all Colorado providers as to who they wanted to be their treatment program. While this is, in the long run, a good thing, there then becomes the problem of knowing what each program is like, what the program's philosophy is in terms of S.O. treatment, and treatment programs willing to share that information; OR for an organization such as CSOR to do its best to pull together a summary of treatment programs in each area around Colorado in order to help men and women make the best possible choice of a provider for their particular needs and personality.

*Christmas is the spirit of giving without a thought of getting. It is happiness because we see joy in people. It is forgetting self and finding time for others. It is discarding the meaningless and stressing the true values. -Thomas S. Monson*