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# WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

**W**e are delighted to highlight in this newsletter just a few of our faithful volunteers. Our volunteers **send thousands of letters and cards** each year to incarcerated women, many of whom would not otherwise receive mail. Volunteers **mentor hurting women** at the jail each week, providing a positive role model who listens deeply and truly cares. They lead **inspirational Bible studies** in the jail and in our transitional home. They serve on our board, sort our mail, and **so much more!** What they have in common is that each of our volunteers change lives AND have their lives changed by working with Changed Choices.



A Sunday School class volunteers by preparing personalized Mother's Day cards for clients.



Volunteer trainer Randy Whitt, right, spent 13 weeks training clients, staff, volunteers, and friends for a 5K race.



## CAROL GAY

**Time volunteering:** 4 years

**Area of involvement:** Mentor for incarcerated mom and children

One of the best things for me as I volunteer for Changed Choices is how much I learn. Not only have I learned a great deal about my own racial, economic, and educational privilege, but I've developed an "informed compassion" through my volunteer experiences. I feel inspired to try to share some of my privilege with others. In addition, through writing my pen pal and visiting her in prison, I have developed a personal awareness of how cruel and unjust our American "criminal justice" system appears to be. I feel challenged to try to make the need for reform in our penal system an important political issue.

This unjust system must change!

## JAN MCNEELY

**Time volunteering:** 4 years    **Area of involvement:** Preparing meals for SEED Group, attending Homeless Services Network meetings

I attend Homeless Services Network meetings once a month and provide information from the meetings that may be useful for the Changed Choices community. I have learned so much about homelessness through this assignment. It has also encouraged me to participate beyond Changed Choices with the Homeless Services Network and my church's advocacy team. We are currently attending City Council meetings as advocates for the homeless and affordable housing.

**247 VOLUNTEERS  
SERVE ON OUR  
PRAYER TEAM. PLEASE  
CONTACT [EASON@  
CHANGEDCHOICES.  
ORG](mailto:EASON@CHANGEDCHOICES.ORG) IF YOU WOULD  
LIKE TO JOIN THEM!**

## KATHLEEN SNYDER

**Time volunteering:** 18 years    **Area of involvement:** Pen pal

When I was in elementary school, I always signed up to have a pen pal from another country. I loved writing letters and receiving them as well. After my children left home 20 years ago, I felt a real void in my life. I wanted to serve God in some way but had no idea how to do that in our new circumstances. Ruth Snyder asked if I would be interested in being a pen pal to a young woman in prison. I was uncertain at first, but God gave me a strong desire to be a part of this amazing ministry. My Spiritual gift is exhortation/encouragement, so being a pen pal is exactly where God knew that I needed to be. I love the women I have written to over the years. I feel so incredibly blessed to be making a tiny impact in the lives of women. I love being a part of Changed Choices and will continue to share scripture and the love of Jesus with the women as long as I can.



## OLANIYI ZAINABU (MS. O)

**Time Volunteering:** 5 years

**Area of involvement:** Card writer, mentor, COOOL Mentor, SEED, and anything else!

I began my search to find an organization that specifically worked with females in the prison system or those transitioning back into society. My heart for helping women to realize their best potential is important to me. Just bringing a smile to a face or helping one of them to feel valued and respected makes me know that this is a ministry for me. I am willing to assist in any area that is needed to be a blessing to the ladies, and that is why it fulfills my own life to do it.



## DIANNE MILLER

**Time volunteering:**

Less than 1 year

**Areas of involvement:** Office volunteer, preparing meals for our SEED Group

As a retiree, I like to use my time in ways that are not only satisfying to me personally, but are God-honoring. After volunteering for a year with a worthwhile organization but one where even the volunteers could not discuss "religion," I decided that was not the place for me. I began looking and praying for another opportunity to serve, and truly felt God leading me to Changed Choices through a set of circumstances that only He could have orchestrated. Changed Choices is doing amazing things for women who are trying to turn their lives around and re-enter society as contributing adults/parents. I am so happy to make a small contribution to what they are doing!

THE ESTIMATED  
VALUE OF EACH  
VOLUNTEER  
HOUR IS **\$24.69.**

OUR VOLUNTEERS LIVE IN  
NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH  
CAROLINA, COLORADO,  
MAINE, AND OREGON.

## SEED GROUP



SEED (Spiritual Encouragement & Emotional Development) Group

is Changed Choices' weekly dinner and Bible study gathering. Volunteers prepare meals, lessons, and enjoy joyful companionship.

According to SEED volunteer & chaplain Jenelle Lozano (above right), "The community, sincere love, and support for each other was a true example of what our Lord meant when He declared we are the Church!"



***"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else."***

**- Booker T. Washington**



COOOL mentors (Changing Our Outlook On Life) volunteer an hour a week mentoring with women in Mecklenburg County Jail.

## JEAN GRIFFITH

**Time volunteering:** 10 years  
**Area of involvement:** Pen pal, cardwriter, mentor and SEED group volunteer

I was first introduced to Changed Choices about 10 years ago during a church-sponsored volunteer week. A group of us went to the transition home. As we ate together, played games, talked, laughed, and got to know each other, I felt I'd found "my place."

I'm involved in SEED, the Bible study that meets in the home each Tuesday evening. We are "church" for each other: studying the scriptures, asking questions, sharing struggles, praying, sometimes crying and often laughing. We are treasured friends... family!!

Through the course of my involvement with the women of Changed Choices, I've learned so much, but mostly I've learned we have more commonalities than differences. We're at various stages, with varied experiences, but we're all women struggling well together.

## VAN WALTON

**Time volunteering:** 2 years  
**Area of involvement:** COOOL mentor

Each week I meet with a youthful offender. Often, when the teenager steps into the room where we are to meet, I detect a rebellious attitude accompanied by body language that clearly sends me the message, "I don't want to meet with you!" I wonder if I will be able to connect with this scared and lost girl. Sometimes we can spend an entire hour together and make no progress. I leave exhausted and defeated. When I return the next week, I am tempted to ask for another girl. God doesn't give me any peace about that thought, so I agree to see her again. Soon we connect. Soon she melts. When she tells me she loves me, I'm the one melting! When I step into the jail, I actually feel like I am walking onto holy ground as I remember Jesus' words, "I am near the broken hearted."



Changed Choices wishes to congratulate **Twila Wellmaker** on her new job with an affordable home ownership company. We appreciate all she has done for our re-entry clients. May God bless her in her new position.

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**14 VOLUNTEERS SERVE ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT CHANGED CHOICES... ENSURING THAT THE ORGANIZATION IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH.**

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