

The Mabel Bassett Balance

SPEAK THE TRUTH. ELEVATE THE COMMUNITY. SHIFT THE VIEW.

Vol. 1 | Issue 3 | April 2025

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Photo from Canva

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The Mabel Bassett Balance

Est. 2024

Vision statement: Speak the truth. Elevate the community. Shift the view.

Mission: Our mission is to inspire hope and advocacy within our community.

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The staff of The Mabel Bassett Balance wishes to thank the Prison Journalism Project for all their training, guidance and encouragement. We also gratefully acknowledge the generous contributions of donors from Poetic Justice, including Linda Lambert. Finally, we wish to thank staff from the Department of Corrections for supporting our endeavors to launch a community newspaper.

Ideas? Feedback? Concerns?

We'd love to hear from you!

We are always looking to uphold a standard of excellence. Our aim is that every member of the broader community at Mabel Bassett feels their perspective and voice are welcome in this publication. To submit story ideas or provide feedback, contact

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Staff photo. Front, from left: Crystal Avilla, Jax, Michelle Walker. Back, from left: Quindessa Monts, Sharee Asberry, Dusti Rickert, Victoria Hooper, Lindsey Smith, Tabitha "Angelica" Mattison. Not pictured: Heather Barbee, Erica Bonner and Rachel Rivera. (Photo by Lacey Hart)

FROM THE EDITORS

A year of change

So far, 2025 has been an exciting year of change — and it is not even half-way over. For months, Mabel Bassett Correctional Center has been engaged in restructuring the general population in an attempt to streamline facility operations. The adjustment has been stressful, not just for the women who were relocated but also for the staff and those whose friends were displaced.

To staff and residents alike, remember: we are all in this together. A little kindness, grace, and mercy go a long way.

The restructuring is a chance for us to do something MBCC has never seen before. Ladies, the administration said numerous times that they are open to constructive solutions to problems, so if you have an idea, get it out there. What ultimately happens is up to us. We all have a voice. We can build a community focused on positive growth and forward momen-

tum, proving to ourselves and to the outside world that it can be done.

We are not just a prison population. We are tutors, painters, cooks, plumbers, students, electricians, writers, data entry clerks, mothers, sisters, daughters, friends — the list goes on and on. In this season of change, be your best self. Show compassion. Approach each task with integrity. Say hello to a stranger. Encourage someone who is struggling. You may be the reason they remain sober for one more day. Just because we are temporarily behind razorwire does not mean we cannot change the world.

Thank you for being amazing!

*Sharee Asberry
Crystal Avilla
Jax*



Questions with Warden Scott Tinsley



Scott Tinsley
Warden
(Photo by
Oklahoma
Department of
Corrections)

Q. How would you assess the first few months since your arrival? Were there special challenges you had not expected? What activities already at Mabel Bassett pleasantly surprised you by their existence?

A. My first few months were very challenging. Establishing structure, consistency, investment, and boundaries were processes new to MBCC inmate population. Upon my arrival it was nice to see and become familiar with the programs at MBCC; RISE (Re-Entry Investment/Student Education and PHI (Prison Health Initiative).

Q. Please briefly describe your top three goals for Mabel Bassett for 2025?

A. To educate and train staff on how to effectively manage a female inmate population. Establish and maintain consistency with both staff and the inmate population. To affect a positive change with the inmate population and staff at our facility.

Q. Headquarters staff made cosmetic changes to Mabel Bassett in 2024, which you are continuing. You have also made substantial programmatic changes here, including a Behavior Modification pod and several diverse avenues toward rewarding positive and uplifting behaviors. You appear intent on supporting personal human revolution behaviorally, emotionally and spiritually. Do you believe such individual changes will exponentially expand to elevate the Mabel Bassett community as a whole?

A. I believe our inmate population needs to believe in themselves. We want them to understand self-value and the benefits of good decision making. I believe if provided a positive, uplifting environment supported by our staff will definitely elevate and expand our community.

Inmate Council updates

Victoria Hooper | Staff Writer

The past few months have been a total success for Mabel Bassett Correctional Center with events happening around every corner.

Through the involvement of staff, we have been able to get many things accomplished for our community. These are successes we have listed so far this year:

- Platinum card applications (pending approval from upper management).
- Poetry night – an event created to facilitate a safe place where community members can build bonds through creative writing.
- Approval for the mail room to be transformed into an office. This will be used as a central place where the community can go for assistance from a council representative.
- Approval for a drop-box to be placed beside the new council office for the community to submit suggestions, comments or concerns any time.
- Games have been purchased through Deputy Warden Nikki Brewer for each unit. The games will be held in the council office and can be checked out by the community. These games include tetherball, cornhole, Battleship, checkers, Disc Golf and many more. Residents are encouraged to submit requests to their fellow council for game purchasing.
- First-quarter food buy: Big Len-ny’s BBQ
- First-quarter hygiene buy from Walmart and Amazon.

Remember, we are here for you.

This is just the start of what is to come here at MBCC. Special thanks to Warden Scott Tinsley, Deputy Warden Brewer, Chief Robin Catcher, Dana Price, Lacey Hart, Kelsey Robinson, and Valerie Taber for their efforts and willingness to make all these things happen. We appreciate you.



Meet your Inmate Council. From left: Kimberly Wenthold, Katesha Childers, Victoria Hooper, Kelsey Robinson, the Warden’s assistant, Megan Hammers, Brittany Nabors, Kelly Fairchild

TEAM REPRESENTATIVES

As representatives, we strive for the betterment of our community. If you have any concerns you would like to discuss, share them with the representative of your unit.

- Here is the team by unit:
- Megan Hammers (D-6)
 - Kelly Fairchild (C1-A)
 - Brittany Nabors (C1- A)
 - Deborah Sipes (C1-A)
 - Victoria Hooper (C1- A)
 - Katesha Childers (C2-C Side 1)
 - Kimberly Wenthold (C3- A)

FEATURE

Coming of age in prison

Crystal Avilla | Editor

Each year in Oklahoma, teenagers are arrested for a variety of offenses. The headlines are splashy and lurid, designed to make us sit up and pay attention. But when the trial is over and the headlines fade away, what happens next?

After sentencing, some go to one of the 11 contracted juvenile detention centers scattered throughout the state. But some, like Kaleigh Fryer, a resident of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, are transferred to prisons like this one to serve their time.

Fryer was arrested at the age of 15, spent approximately 16 months in Logan County Jail, and received a life sentence at the age of 16. Unlike most teenagers, she did not go to prom, get her driver's license or have a sweet sixteen. She never even possessed a state ID. Instead, she wore a state-issued smock and sported a prison ID.

Besides phone calls and sporadic visits with friends and family, Fryer was subjected to the peer pressure of adults who led her down a destructive path early in her sentence. Only when she reached maturity did she decide to change her life around and become a productive member of her community.

According to information provided by attorney Lashandra Peoples-Johnson, first published on Oklahoma's News 9, minors as young as 13 in Oklahoma can be charged as adults for offenses like first-degree murder, though typically, this only occurs to those over age 15.

For years, people have debated whether it is morally and ethically right to sentence someone as if they are irredeemably corrupt when they have not yet reached mental maturity. As noted by The Sentencing Project, evidence suggests "incarceration is a failed strategy for rehabilitating youth and protecting the public. [and] ignores the lessons of emerging adolescent development research."

Although there has been some movement in the fight to cap juvenile sen-

"When they said they were giving me a life sentence, I didn't even know what that meant. How could I comprehend what a life sentence in prison would be like?"

tencing on the national level, Oklahoma has so far been unwilling to offer relief to those who commit crimes at a young age, despite proven science that the brain continues developing until age 25.

"I remember sitting in the courtroom feeling lost and confused. They were using terminology I'd never heard at

the time, and my attorney didn't bother explaining it." Fryer shifted in her seat, remembering: "When they said they were giving me a life sentence, I didn't even know what that meant. How could I comprehend what a life sentence in prison would be like? It was so surreal. They were just a bunch of adults in suits in that courtroom, staring at me like I was one of them, like I should have known better. Not one of them offered sympathy or noticed that I was terrified."

Fryer does not know why, as a child, she made the choices she did, but thinks a lot of them were because she feared an adult abuser. Not until she was 23 did Fryer feel able to contemplate risks and consequences. She was 26 before she began turning her desire for change into an action plan—11 years

after she was arrested.

She is currently in college and will graduate with an associates degree in the fall. With the current 85% parole requirement, Fryer will be 53 years old before her file goes in front of the Parole Board, and even then there is no guarantee she will be released.

"After 10 years, a person will show you who they really are," Fryer said with passion in her voice. "They're not even the same person they were when they came in," she said, "And this is especially true for those who come to prison when they're young. I hope we have a chance one day to prove we understand the hurt our actions have caused and that we're sorry."

Rachel Rivera, a 30-year veteran of MBCC, has seen many underage women enter the penitentiary. "I was arrested at 18 and thought I knew everything. Obviously I didn't make the best decisions," Rivera said. When asked about the fairness of juvenile sentencing, Rivera reflected on her own experience. "Young people," she said, "are especially susceptible to peer pressure and all kinds of other external factors. Sentencing them to life in prison doesn't guarantee they will become rehabilitated. Sometimes they end up worse because they think they already lost everything, so there is no point in trying. I agree they should be punished if they do wrong, but giving them a life sentence is excessive."

Two in five people sentenced to life without parole were 25 and under at the time of their conviction.

Source: The Sentencing Project



The families we make

Jax | Editor

Separation from friends and loved ones is one of the greatest challenges of incarceration. Loneliness is a universal construct, but the way incarcerated residents compensate is handled differently based on gender. Women form family attachments and create pseudo-families from within their friendship circles. Many incarcerated residents came from situations where they felt alone or even abandoned by their biological families.

“Stability and constancy was never a thing before,” said Mabel Bassett Correctional Center resident Christina Nelson.

Others had good bonds with their biological families yet developed close attachments to friends while incarcerated, which are deeper than most friendships. “My outside family, we’re close. My best friend is like my family to me. She’s my ‘ride and die.’ Stick with you through thick and thin,” said MBCC resident Gloria Tiger.

These family units develop their own hierarchy. Roles of mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters and so forth are assigned by group members in accordance with idealized concepts of who and what those persons should be and how they should act. Ladies call each other by these titles and expect other residents outside the group to know and acknowledge these relationship structures.



Designed by Freepik

Acting Clinical Director at MBCC Mental Health Services, Christina Holloway, sees daily how these pseudo-family units operate in a carceral setting. “The benefits of forming family-modeled units are obviously the support system they [the incarcerated residents] didn’t otherwise have,” said Acting Director Holloway. “These family units create a sense of acceptance.”

Although she now has a grandfather who stands with her, Nelson feels her

prison family is a close and loving system she was once lacking. “There really is no comparison between my prison family in here and my family out there because I had no real family out there,” said Nelson.

There are mental health benefits to these pseudo-families. “It helps limit the levels of depression and anxiety,” said Acting Director Holloway. If a resident feels supported and accepted, they are less likely to stay bogged down in

negative states.

Tiger feels blessed to have a chosen sister here to help her through daily challenges. “She walks me through everything. She’s encouraging, and she’s smart,” Tiger said. “When my mother passed, she was there for me.” Her sister assisted Tiger through her bereavement, not only her keeping company but offering steady support during a difficult time.

“As far as pitfalls, [creating pseudo-families] could cause someone to look at a person with blinders, limiting their ability to see someone as they are, including what brought that person to prison,” Acting Director Holloway said. This willful blindness leaves room for abusive or exploitative situations to arise.

In prison, there is no possibility of getting space when there is conflict. “We can’t take a break and walk away when we fight. We fight. There’s either a fence or a door. It forces us to face each other head-on,” Nelson said. While this added tension can sometimes exaggerate aggressive situations, it can also force participants to deal with emotions rather than leave them bottled up or unprocessed.

Celebrating milestones is an important function of the pseudo-family unit. These groups celebrate birthdays, holidays and each other’s outside family victories, just like their counterparts beyond the prison’s fences. Nelson recalled stories from weekly potluck gatherings, emphasizing how important these events are to her.

“Family dinners are the best, to enjoy the simple things that the rush of the world cannot take away,” Nelson said.

Daily support is similarly significant in keeping incarcerated residents socially engaged. “We just hang out at the table and talk, chit-chat, eat together, cook together. We’re the best of friends,” Gloria Tiger said.

Overall, the family units that female incarcerated residents develop while in prison yield positive results. “It allows an individual to cope with prison life because they find support and acceptance,” Acting Director Holloway said.

Nelson agreed. “The construction of these pseudo-families gives a sense of empowerment to the members. This time, when I’m making a family, I have a choice,” she said.

FEATURE

ASAP Preach sets the tone for the New Year

Victoria Hooper | Staff Writer

All photos by Lance West



ASAP Preach leads a crowd in worship.

Many people begin the new year with a resolution to do things better. This is usually expressed with a statement like “new year, new me.” What if we could change this resolution into a group effort, replacing the word “me” with “us”?

That is exactly what we are actively doing here at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center. The “new year, new us” commitment started with the never-before welcoming of well-known Christian rap artist and influencer ASAP Preach.

When asked how MBCC got the rapper to perform in the prison, Coach Jared McCord said: “It was Brittney Orand’s idea. As soon as she brought the information to me, I contacted him. It surprised me when he messaged back in 10 minutes. It didn’t take us long to come up with a game plan and date.”

The response to the performance was absolutely breath-taking and seeing everyone having a great time together was truly remarkable.

“I have been here 30 years and I

have never seen anything like this,” said MBCC resident Katrina Lane. “I felt like I was out in the world going to a concert, it was so exciting. I was not in prison that day.”

With hands lifted toward the sky, the entertainers ASAP Preach, Big Yett, Papa Yeet and Doug took turns prophesying, encouraging and placing praying hands on the ladies during worship.

“When ASAP prayed for me he told me to tell everyone three things: One, God sees them; two, God has not forgotten them and three, God loves them,” said Michele Knight. “This was confirmation of what I should be doing in my life.”

This experience was much needed at MBCC and left many women feeling inspired. It is important to remember that all of this began with a creative, courageous idea.

“This experience made me realize that I can make a difference. It made me believe that my ideas can make an impact in the lives of others,” Brittney Orand said.

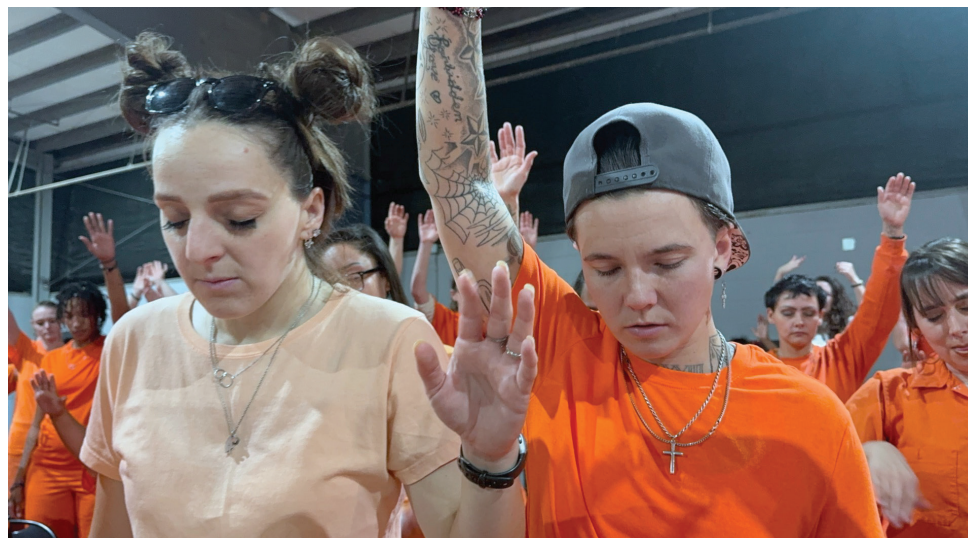
This event may have been the beginning of MBCC’s “new year, new us” commitment, but it does not end there. In fact, Coach McCord said, “as long as we continue to grow and do better, ASAP Preach would love to come back and share more time with us.”

“This was confirmation of what I should be doing in my life.”

Michele Knight



A crowd moved by worship.



Gym Staff Chandler Kardaras and Brittney Orand embrace the presence of the Lord together.

With Thanks

Special thank-you to Warden Scott Tinsley for the approval; Coach Jared McCord for sacrificing the time and effort for this event; and the Gym orderlies for creating such a welcoming space for the community.

Oklahoma’s fines and fees are financial imprisonment; need reform

Lindsey Smith | Staff Writer

The 58th Oklahoma Legislature briefly inspired hope for justice-involved citizens when Senate Bill 951 (SB 951) passed unanimously through the Senate. Designed to lessen court fees and fines, its failure to pass through the House keeps some Oklahomans in bondage to the state.

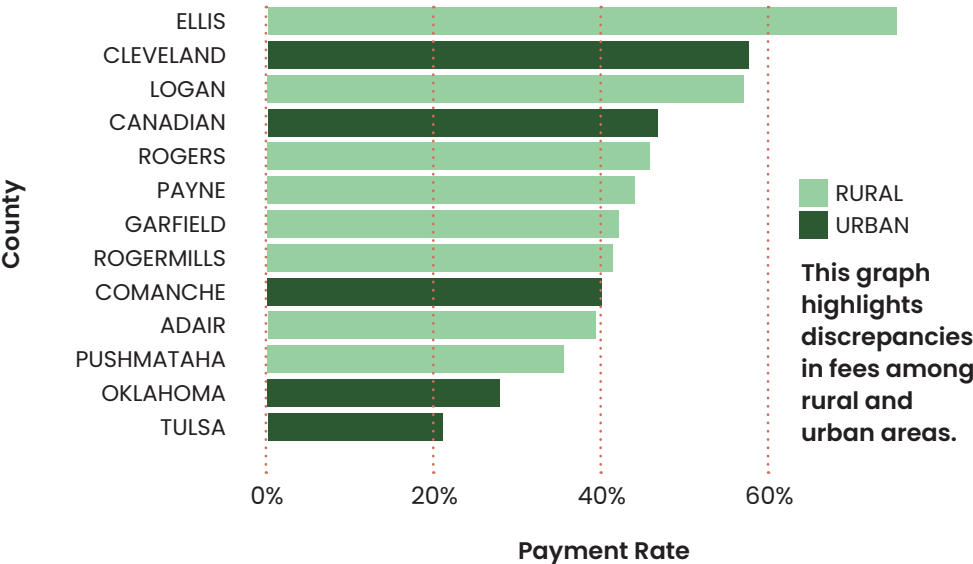
“A lot of my setbacks in life are because of fines and fees,” said Paige Cotton, a resident of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center. “I missed months with my newborn daughter because of past fines and fees. And when they arrest you over failure to pay,” she said, “they add even more fees. It financially imprisoned me.”

Cotton said she owes about \$30,000 in court costs and fees. She is getting ready to discharge from MBCC after serving almost five years. “I hope to pay as much as I can my first year and hopefully the courts will work with me after that,” said Cotton. “I am nervous about it, especially with the state of the economy right now.”

SB 951, written by Senator Julie Daniels, R-Bartlesville, was created to alleviate

FINES/FEES PAYMENT RATE BY COUNTY

For Cases Filed in 2016



Source: Open Justice Oklahoma court records database. Data compiled and analyzed by Oklahoma Policy Institute

some of the financial hardships for those who are justice-involved. While most fees go unpaid, failing to pay can land citizens back in jail. When asked about the future of SB 951, Sen. Daniels said that relief in

the future is still possible.

“I strongly believe people should be rewarded for making regular payments over a period of time by having what they owe (except restitution) be reduced even

more and at some point, be completely forgiven,” she said.

Court and executive agencies rely on the fines and fees collected in order to operate, which may explain why some legislators find it hard to deviate from the status quo. While SB 951 did not pass during that legislative session, it did receive significant support from advocates, the Senate and even the Governor of Oklahoma, Kevin Stitt.

Stitt vocalized his support during the State of the State Address in February. “I want to change that structure and make sure that a second chance is actually a second chance and get rid of fines, fees and court costs for good,” he stated.

When asked if she felt like she was being given a second chance after serving time, Cotton was hesitant. “I feel like I still have to prove myself with the courts financially before I’ll feel like I’m getting a second chance,” she said.

Editor’s note: Since this article was written, the Oklahoma House of Representatives passed a bill revising some fines and fees for formerly incarcerated individuals. The bill moves on for a hearing in the Senate.

OPINION

The Truth in 85%

Lindsey Smith | Staff Writer

The incarcerated population in Oklahoma is well aware of the 85% rule, but citizens who are not justice-involved may not know of its existence and the destruction it takes on state resources and community morale.

“I was told at 21 I would spend 25 years of my life in prison,” said Mabel Bassett Correctional Center resident Chandler Karadaras. “I was angry, not because I was having to do time, but because I was doing everything I could to better myself, yet it didn’t matter. The courts offer no relief.”

Maintaining a hard-on-crime stance, Oklahoma courts hand out sentences based on generalized offense guidelines. This difference in sentencing may be one reason the state of Oklahoma is fourth in the nation for incarceration,

according to The Sentencing Project.

In comparison to the hard-on-crime philosophy of Oklahoma, Judge Brent Dishman of Oklahoma County offered a different frame of reference to sentencing he has experienced with the military: “In military courts martial, prosecutors apply the guiding principle that a sentence to confinement should only be of such a length as to punish and deter that specific offender. As long as necessary, but short as possible. In that way, sentencing guidelines and ‘going rates’ are generally not applied.”

Not only is Oklahoma known to give excess sentences, but it continues to follow the 85% rule once implemented by the federal government as an incentive to receive funding. The Truth-In-Sentencing Incentive Grant program of

the 1990s gave the states funding who promised to expand their prison population and implement its 85% rule. The rule regulated that offenders with violent labels must complete 85% of their sentence before being eligible for parole. The rule is often associated with first-time offenders as well as offenses that lack harmful intent.

Kimberly Wenthold, an MBCC resident and a first-time offender stated, “My judge said she didn’t believe I would ever reoffend, but I was given a 25-year sentence. Ten years later, I have a heart of repentance, college degrees, and prosocial behavior, yet no one will give me a second look ‘cause I’m labeled as a violent offender.”

Wenthold and Karadaras are not alone in experiencing redundant sentencing that does not reflect reform. In a time of promoting common-sense criminal justice reform in the state of Oklahoma, the notion of accountability and incarceration should no longer correlate. The incarcerated population locked away for

solely accountability purposes cost taxpayers thousands of dollars.

As funding from The-Truth-In-Sentencing federal incentive has ceased, Oklahoma now has to allocate funds to sustain its mass incarceration without federal assistance.

For a state that comes in near the bottom of national rankings in education standard and healthcare services, as reported by U.S. News and World Report and WalletHub, it only makes sense for Oklahoma resources to be invested towards other outlets capable of eventually stopping cycles of crimes. One component to achieve this growth is by moving away from The Truth-In-Sentencing standard and alleviating redundant sentences for those who no longer pose a threat to society.

“The truth is, there is no truth in the 85% rule,” Wenthold said as she loaded her college books into her bag. “And we can do better,” she added. “The state of Oklahoma can do better.”

Letters to the future

On Jan. 8, 2025, French filmmaker Brice Lambert visited with Mabel Bassett Correctional Center residents for his upcoming documentary about inequities in the U.S. justice system and the impacts of gender bias. Hosted by Poetic Justice, a non-profit that offers restorative writing workshops for incarcerated women at Mabel Bassett and Eddie Warrior, the participants were asked to write a letter to future generations of young women.

Here are those letters. May they inspire you as much as we hope they will future generations of our young women.



Dear future generations,

I want you to know how very much I love you and wish only the best for you. There are a few things—things I wish I had known—that I want you to know and do, for you and your future. Love yourself. You are beautiful, strong, intelligent, and worthy. Never let anyone steal this love from you.

Stand up for yourself. You must be a voice that is never silenced, minimized, or forgotten. You are that important.

When you can do the first two things, then you can find healthy love from your partner, family and children, but never neglect yourself. . . .

Rest. It's okay to take a break. Be good to yourself. Allow quiet time.

Appreciate the small things. These small things add up to larger things. Believe me, you notice when they are no longer there.

Be spontaneous. Have fun. Frolic. You are never too old to play.

Be generous. Sometimes the smallest gifts are appreciated the most.

Be kind. You never know what the other person is going through and your kindness may make the difference.

Make plans for the future, but don't forget to enjoy today.

Forgive when you can. It is you that carries the burden when you can't forgive. This includes forgiving yourself.

Mostly, remember how much you are loved. Never forget that.

Love Always,

Michelle Walker

To My Granddaughters,

I pray that this reaches you in great health and good spirits. Many things, I am sure, in time have changed.

However, some things will never change. I want you to know and truly understand how imperative it is to know who you are and be unapologetic about it.

It is vital to always stand firm in your character and beliefs, not allowing others to easily sway you. Also, child, the shade of your skin will not matter as much as you being a woman will. Things will be difficult along your journey on the red road, but have courage when facing these tough times. You are never ALONE! . . .

Remember you are so important. Who you are matters to the generations to follow you. Find out what it is that you want in this life and to what lengths you will go to acquire it. You are a warriorress.

Jamie Post oak

Dear Tuesday,

It's 2025 now, and the world seems pretty scary. You still live in Oklahoma, so there are probably some things we should talk about.

First of all, I am so proud of you. The obstacles you've already overcome would've crushed other people, but you're still standing. But be extra cautious about some of those obstacles—a recovering alcoholic parent, an incarcerated parent, mental health challenges—put you at risk statistically for trouble in the future. . . .

But you are brave and beautiful and strong. You are intelligent, and most of all you are kind. You are helping to rebuild the world you've been left. And I believe in you, and your vision, and your power. I believe God will guide and help you. I believe the world you create will be strong and beautiful and kind, like you. I love you.

Love, Mom

Sonia Weidenfelder

To my future granddaughters,

I am so sorry that we left you with our mess. We tried, as mothers, to raise up good men. This has been our only true goal since time began.

Our only goal, because the rigid expectations of my upbringing were harder and harsher than any metal bars. They caged me in the reality of American society long before I ever ended up ... [here].

Etiquette is a woman's word. Antiquated and horrible. Etiquette attempts to draw an ethereal veil over an impossible, yet undeniable truth of the women living in my world—women live imprisoned in a man's world. The best that we can hope for is to find a kind jailer.

My granddaughters, I am sorry that we left you with our mess. But please, do not despair. You were born to be a maker of keys.

So please, please, unlock a different world for yourselves.

Michelle King

Dear Beautiful Black Woman,

When you wake up in the morning—
take a deep breath and say,

"Thank you Jesus," no matter how you feel.

As the tears roll down your face—
take a long look in the mirror.

You are royalty.

So hold your head up high
and refuse to be a victim.

Fight – Fight!

You may look weak

but much strength resides in you.

Valuable.

Your trials may be weighty,

but you gain muscle as you place them at His feet.

Every mountain must be moved—
Pursue.

Through every storm—

the cleansing of the raging waves give way
to every purpose and promise connected to
your life.

Phenomenal.

Made in the image of Excellency

you are destined for greatness—

don't let anyone tell you anything different.

You can do this . . .

Go get 'em.

Love, Mom

Sharee Asberry

To my dearest child,

My greatest joy in life was to become a mother
to all four of you wonderful children. In the same
sense, when you were ripped and torn from my
grasp, this world stopped and became a very
dark and joyless existence. Please watch who you
surround yourself with because you may never
know someone's true colors until it's too late ...

So, my final piece of advice is follow your heart
filled with love, learn something everyday, and
laugh as much as possible.

With all my hope,

Christina Nelson

My Makayla,

You will do well to remember that your voice, the words
you speak, will be the most powerful and effective
weapon, offensive and defensive, that you will ever
possess. Learn how to maximize its power. With every
word you use, you are either planting life or you are
planting death and decay. Choose your every word
carefully. Make every word count. . . . If used correctly,
this powerful tool, your voice, can be used to make your
present world, and the world of future generations, even
better than you can imagine. ...

Be a pollinator, spreading your goodness to all people.

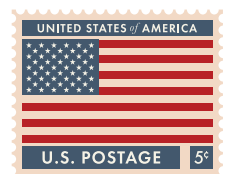
Mom of Hope

Sarah Garis

My Beloved Karleigh,

I have been so blessed to be your favorite aunt/uncle
Ashe. I have so much to tell you, like how I know you
can and will change the world. You have always been
a natural born leader, so use those skills! This world
needs women that aren't afraid to rock the boat and
say what needs to be said. Everyone deserves a truth
teller in their lives, be that. Now, remember when you
see a need, you have been called. That means you
shouldn't be complacent and wait for some man to
step up to handle the hard stuff for you. Speaking of
men, you do not need some man, woman, or sentient
being to complete you. You are whole by yourself and
a partner is just the topping on the sundae, not the
whole thing. If they do not uplift, edify, or add to your
life, then they don't deserve to be in it. With all that
said, be the type of person that people want to be
around. Be kind, compassionate, loving, and funny.
NEVER be quiet, docile, or a doormat. Be weird and
own it. Be exactly who you want to be even if that
means changing your gender. I will always be your
biggest cheerleader. Now, go pass this on, plaster it
up on a billboard, and write it in the sky. You are the
next generation. I love you more than I can express.
P.S. I will always be on your laser tag team. We can
whoop 'em all! Bwa-ha-ha!

Ashe Garrison



“When I heard what Trump is talking about doing, dread settled in my stomach. My kids’ dad may be an immigrant, but he’s a good man. He has sole custody of our kids—legal custody. He works hard to provide for them.”

Quindessa Monts



Para Español
Read this article
in Spanish on the
next page.

Like most of our forefathers, immigrants come to the United States for freedom and safety. While some manage to make it into this country legally, many feel they have no choice but to come undocumented—without a visa or other legal documentation. In spite of how they arrive, the majority are just decent people seeking an opportunity to support their families, which is often impossible in some countries.

Veronica Ceballos, the pastor for Spanish Bible Study, has been an integral part of Mabel Bassett’s only bilingual service for 14 years. She started coming to the US from Mexico on tourist visas when she was 18, eventually becoming an American citizen in 2007. For her, the lure was having access to goods and services.

“My only regret is leaving people I know I’ll never see again—people I grew up with.” The high cost of traveling between countries keeps people like Ceballos from being able to visit loved ones. “I come from a big family, and I can’t even be there to say goodbye to relatives when they pass,” she said.

Recently, thousands of undocumented immigrants across America—including those in prison—have been deported or are in the process of being deported, sometimes after decades of living in this country. The New York Times noted that in the past month, nearly 23,000 immigrants have been arrested and 18,000 have already been deported.

What does this mean for the families they leave behind?

Quindessa Monts, a resident of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, has two children with an undocumented immigrant and is scared for the future. “When I heard what Trump is talking about doing, dread settled in my stomach. My kids’ dad may be an immigrant,



Photo from Canva

OPINION

Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses

Rachel Rivera | Staff Writer

but he’s a good man. He has sole custody of our kids—legal custody. He works hard to provide for them.”

Monts teared up and had to pause. “I lie awake at night thinking about it. I don’t want my kids ending up in the system because I’m in here. They [the authorities] could just take them to a facility somewhere like they don’t even matter and I’ll never see them again, just because their dad’s an immigrant. I don’t know what I’m going to do,” she said.

Trump’s Executive order, “Protecting the American People Against Invasion,” was signed on Jan. 20, 2025. It targets undocumented immigrants; separating families, creating division and causing pain.

Has American ideology changed so much from just over 100 years ago?

The poem “New Colossus,” written by Emma Lazarus in 1883, lies forgotten on the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Once a symbol of the American standard, its words now ring hollow:

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to
breathe free.*

*The wretched refuse of your teeming
shore.*

*Send these, the homeless, tem-
pest-tost to me,*

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

In this era of fear-mongering and divisive politics, perhaps a new approach is needed; one that considers each case on an individual basis. It may be hard to imagine why someone would risk their life coming to an unfamiliar land, facing uncertain and daunting odds to start a new life, but it cannot be difficult to imagine them as people—just like us—with hopes and dreams.

OPINION

Denme a sus cansados, a sus pobres, a sus masses apiñadas

Rachel Rivera | Escrito de Personel
Traducido por
Quindessa Monts | Escrito de Personel

Como la mayoría de nuestros antepasados, los inmigrantes vinieron a los Estados Unidos en busca de libertad y seguridad. Si bien algunas lograron entrar a este país legalmente, mucho sintieron que no tuvieron mas opción, que venir indocumentados; sin visa o documentos legales. A pesar de como llegaron la mayoría son personas decentes que buscan una oportunidad para mantener a sus familia, lo cual es imposible en algunos países.

Verónica Ceballos, Pastora de Estudio Bíblico de Español, ha sido parte integral del único servicio bilingüe de Mabel Bassett durante 14 años. Comienzo a venir a los Estados con visa turista cuando tiene solamente 18 años. Finalmente se convirtió en ciudadana estadounidense en 2007. Para ella lo atractivo era tener acceso de los beneficios y servicios en este país.

“Mi único arrepentimiento es dejar a gente que nunca volveré a ver, la gente con la que crecí.” El alto costo de viajar entre países, impide que la gente como la vigilancia pueda visitar nuestro. “Venga de una familia grande y no puedo estar allá para decirles adiós a nuestros queridos fallecidos.”

Recientemente miles de indocumentados en América incluyendo los encarcelados--han sido deportados o están en el proceso de ser deportados, a veces después de vivir en este país por décadas. En The New York Times notaron que en el mes pasado cerca de 23,000 inmigrantes fueron arrestados y 18,000 han sido deportados.

Que significa esto para nuestros familias que dejaron atrás?

Quindessa Monts, una residente



Photo from Canva

de Mabel Basset Correctional Center, tiene dos hijos con un inmigrante que se indocumentado y teme por el futuro. “Cuando escuche lo que Trump quería hacer, sentí devastada en el fondo. El padre de mis hijos es un inmigrante, pero es un buen hombre. El tiene la custodia de nuestros hijos--la custodia legal. Trabaja duro para proveer por ellos.”

Con lagrimas, Monts tomo una pausa. “Por las noches me pongo a pensar en esto. No quiero que el estado me quite mi hijos solamente porque estoy encarcelada. Ellos [la autoridades] se pueden llevar a mis hijos a algún edificio como que sus vidas no tiene importancia y jamas lo volveré a ver porque su papa es inmigrante. No se que voy hacer.”

La orden ejecutivo de Trump, “Protegiendo las Americanos Contra Invasión,” que fue firmada el 20 de Enero 2025. El objetivo esta en contra de los inmigrantes que son indocumentados, separando familias, causando dolor y criando distancia.

Sera que la ideología de América ha

cambiando tanto en mas de 100 anos?

El poema Nueva Colossus escrito por Emma Lazarus en 1883, fue olvidado en la base de la Estatua de Libertad en el puerto de Nueva York. Lo que alguna vez fue el símbolo de los Americanos, hoy sus palabras suenan como un hueco:

*“Mi único
arrepentimiento
es dejar a gente
que nunca
volveré a ver,
la gente con la
que crecí.”*

*Denme a sus cansados,
a sus pobres
A sus mases apiñadas
que anhelan respirar en libertad*

*Los rechazados en la
costa de la multitud
Envíenme a estos, sin
hogar, los azotados por
la tempestad*

*Levante mi lampada
junto a la puerta dorada.*

En esta poca la política busca en causa coas y miedo. Quizás necesitan alguna nueva alternativa; una que considera cada caso individualmente. Puede ser difícil de imaginar porque. Pondría su vida en riesgo para llegar en un país que no conocen enfrentando incertidumbre para empezar una vida nueva, pero no puede ser difícil de imaginar los inmigrantes como personas--como nosotros--con esperanzas y sueños.

Searching for hope

Heather Barbee | Staff Writer

During incarceration, much like anywhere, hope is a must if a resident wants to persevere and thrive. Hope is a choice. We spend a long time looking for what was taken, not what was given. When we focus on even the smallest things, we find hope and blessings in abundance.

Residents must search for hope daily, as if seeking out a hidden, rare, and precious treasure. Because that is what hope is to the incarcerated: a rare and precious treasure.

Hope in a prison full of individuals doing 10 years to life, sometimes without the possibility of parole, looks different than to individuals in the free world, or even in a minimum security prison.

It can be situational and affected by an individual's worldview. Someone once said “people don't respond to what happens to them in life – they respond to what they tell themselves happened in their lives.” Sadly, we also believe what we say we are or are not.

But hope can find a way, and it exists at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in recent changes in our diets; new exercise equipment; beautiful murals on the walls; a warden and staff who take the time to see a person and not a number attached to the worst day of that resident's life; the kindness and support of peers and volunteers; the feeling of being fully known, seen and heard; spirituality; legislative changes; and watching another longtimer walk out the gate after someone finally looked and listened to who they are now.

“When we see individuals willing to sow into our lives that gives us hope,” resident Brooklyn Williams said.



Collage by Cait Palmiter



Colleen McCarty, the face of Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice and staunch advocate for domestic violence survivors. (Photo courtesy from Colleen McCarty)

Born to reform

Michelle Walker | Staff Writer

Colleen McCarty is more than a figurehead, an attorney, or a politician. She is a force of nature. Brent Rowland, legal director for Oklahoma Appleseed Center, said McCarty leads the "fight for justice and opportunity for every Oklahoman." Her drive comes from both her passion and compassion.

McCarty is a life-long Oklahoman who is tireless in her efforts for criminal justice reform. She decided to become a lawyer while pregnant with her son. Put on bedrest four months into her pregnancy, McCarty took a long, hard look at her life: "I remember thinking a lot about what I was doing in life . . . [and] what I wanted to be for my kids." She decided to put her brain—her self-disclosed best asset—to good use in criminal law. Four years later, in 2020, she graduated from law school at the University of Tulsa. By early the next year, McCarty was the Policy Counsel and Deputy Director of Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform.

In March 2022, McCarty was approached by an old friend to start an Appleseed Network Center in Oklahoma. After meeting with Benet Magnuson, director of the Network, she was inspired by the work of the other cen-

ters and believed Oklahomans would benefit from this type of advocacy. A month later, she filed the paperwork to create the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice and now serves as its founding executive director.

By that May, two advocates, Ashlyn Faulkner and Amanda Ross, brought McCarty the case of an incarcerated domestic violence survivor, April Wilkens. At the same time she began listening to a podcast about Nicole Addimando, a woman incarcerated in New York for shooting her abuser, and the New York Domestic Violence Survivor Justice Act (DVSJA).

New York advocates fought for 10 years before DVSJA passed in 2019, allowing resentencing for survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This inspired McCarty and her team to create the Oklahoma Survivor Justice Coalition to advocate for convicted domestic violence survivors in Summer 2022. McCarty and her colleague, Leslie Briggs, also

created a podcast called "Panic Button" featuring Wilkens's case.

After realizing the impact of the podcast and their preliminary advocacy work, McCarty partnered with the Sentencing Project and several other local domestic violence service providers to promote the Oklahoma Survivors' Act in 2023. Initially, the bill did not pass; some lawmakers wanted to remove the retroactivity clause, which would allow for resentencing opportunities for those currently incarcerated.

After the end of session, Oklahoma Appleseed and its partners held a "funeral" for the bill. As people spoke, they pulled away black lace to reveal each of the enlarged photos of incarcerated domestic violence survivors such as Wilkens, Shari McDonald, Erica Harrison and Keabreana Boyd. "It was a powerful image," said McCarty.

That event led House Floor Leader Representative Jon Echols, R-Oklahoma City, to sponsor the bill in 2024 in the House of Representatives and former Senate Pro Tem Greg Treat,

R-Oklahoma City, to be the Senate author. The Oklahoma Survivors' Bill, SB 1835, passed on May 21, 2024, on McCarty's daughter's birthday. The bill passed a mere two years after its initial conception, much less than New York's decade-long campaign.

"Colleen makes networking and coalition-building look effortless. She connects and communicates with everybody. She can share her views with integrity and still reinforce the inherent dignity of those who may disagree with her." No matter the political alliance, common ground can be found.

McCarty is very aware of Oklahoma's history with intimate partner violence. She said, "Violence has been a second language to us ... It's in our DNA,

and even when we didn't want it to, it crept into our homes. It crept into what should have been our safest places: our relationships."

The Oklahoma Survivors' Act is meant to help people who have been victims of intimate partner violence. "Many survivors of violence fight back," McCarty said, "and even though their abusers have evaded accountability for numerous systemic reasons—they are made to pay through prosecution, imprisonment, and excessive sentences."

Appleseed is currently representing 17 survivors based on the passage of this bill. McCarty also believes that Oklahoma's criminal justice sentencing laws need to be revisited. Oklahoma, she said, has "a very draconian criminal sentencing system compared to surrounding states. We need to right-size our sentences and allow people the chance to get their lives and families back after incarceration." McCarty said that the best result they have seen has been the passage of the Oklahoma Survivors' Act and the impact that it is having for survivors.

However the Center's justice reform work is not done, however. They currently have Senate Bill 870 going through the legislative process that would improve conditions and accountability for

detained youth if it passes this year. She also said that Oklahoma must actively work to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline by creating a youth justice system that truly rehabilitates and gives young offenders the tools to turn their lives around.

Harrison called McCarty an angel fulfilling God's calling. Colleen McCarty

may not be an actual angel, but she is a fierce mother, lawyer and advocate. She works diligently to ensure that every Oklahoman has a seat at the table and a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

Reach Out

If you or a loved one have experienced intimate partner abuse and need support, reach out to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) at 1-800-799-7233 or the National Crisis Lifeline at 988. If you have experienced a sexual assault and need support, reach out to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) at 1-800-656-4673 or the NDVH.

Oklahoma Appleseed is providing consultation and pro bono support for Oklahoma Survivors' Act cases. If you or a loved one are currently incarcerated and believe the Survivors' Act applies to your case, please write to the following address: Oklahoma Appleseed 822 E 6th St., Tulsa OK 74120 to be put in touch with an attorney who can look at your case.



HOW DOES SB 1835 WORK?

Known as the Oklahoma Survivors' Act, the law requires courts to take physical, sexual or psychological abuse by a sexual partner, family member, household member, trafficker, or someone who used the person for financial gain into account when a person is convicted. It allows the defendant to provide evidence of the abuse (i.e., court records, pre-sentencing reports, social services records, hospital records, witness statements, law enforcement records, domestic incident reports or protective orders, etc.) to be considered for sentencing. The courts are permitted to impose a new, lesser sentence if it determines the defendant was a victim of domestic violence at the time of the offense and the violence or abuse was related to and a substantial contributing factor in causing the defendant to commit the offense. The law provides retroactivity, allowing people who are currently incarcerated to submit a request to apply for resentencing so courts can consider whether domestic violence should be considered as a mitigating factor. It does not apply to people required to register as a sex offender, convicted for child abuse, convicted for abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult or someone who is sentenced to death.



Pianist Eric Genuis wowed at Mabel Bassett on Valentine's Day, bringing love and joy to our residents. (Photo courtesy of Eric Genuis)

Eric Genuis shows us the power of music

World class musicians come to Mabel Bassett

Sonia Weidenfelder | Guest Contributor

The lights are dim, the audience holds its breath and after a moment it begins: a flurry of fiery notes rains down on the hushed crowd, then the dissonance resolves into a melody of unsurpassed sweetness.

I look around the dark room and see hopeful faces slick with tears. But this is not a concert hall or an auditorium. This is the gym here at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center.

On Feb. 14, composer and pianist Eric Genuis and three other world-class musicians held two concerts, one for each side of the yard. The concerts were made possible by the gracious efforts of staff and administration and the generosity of Genuis. While the music was transformative, the message was even more so.

"I believe in you, I believe in us," Genuis said, "and I believe in the im-

part of music on society and the individual."

When asked why he plays in prisons, Genuis said: "Really it's an experience we're both having. You have no less dignity because you're wearing orange than the woman who is wearing the \$5,000 dress. I am trying to offer a chance to elevate our shared humanity."

Later he said, "Give a kid a steady diet of pessimism, and they will look at the world through the lens of cynicism. Give a kid a steady diet of beauty, and they will look at life through the lens of hope."

MBCC resident and concert audience member Stephanie Garcia said, "As soon as the music started playing, I felt a sense of peace and joy. I've never experienced anything like that."

Another resident, Tequetta Adams, remarked that "it was an experience I will never forget. That somebody

thought that much about us, it's very life changing."

Resident Gloria Woody echoed Adams's sentiments.

"I saw a lot of people get emotional just on what they heard," she said. "Music can change the way they look at life and the way they feel, change their thoughts."

When Coach Jared McCord, gym supervisor, was asked what he hoped music and these special events would do for the yard, he said: "I know what it's like to have your mind frozen in one spot. Music was one of the things that really helped me out. It helps the soul. Anything that I can do to free your mind. You all have to have an advocate for you."

Perhaps pianist Genuis said it best as the concert neared its end: "You have a dignity that is unreachable, unspeakable, complex and sublime."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Teacher of the Year

Congratulations to Ms. Rachele Lowry, named the Department of Corrections 2024–2025 Teacher of the Year!

Phone call pricing update

SECURUS phone calls now only \$0.06 per minute.

FAFSA update

Beginning in the Fall 2025 semester, residents of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center will no longer be able to use Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) funding at Rose State College. Unfortunately, only those with alternate means of funding will be eligible for enrollment. Examples of alternate funding are as follows:

- Self-pay
- Tribal
- Scholarship

Submission boxes

Submission boxes are coming to the gym and library for newspaper feedback and suggestions.

A reason to run

TEEM, The Education and Employment Ministry, in partnership with ODOC and the Prison Health Initiative (PHI), will host a 5K run for MBCC residents on Sunday, April 27, coinciding with the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon.

Speaking about the event to TEEM, MBCC Warden Scott Tinsley said, "The women incarcerated here continue to inspire me and fill me with pride. Their commitment to honoring this significant moment in Oklahoma's history is a powerful reminder that they remain Oklahoma citizens, even while incarcerated."



OBITUARIES

In Memoriam

Laura Pitman, Ph.D.

Jax | Editor

Laura Pitman, Ph.D., was very special. She died on Feb. 28 after long battles with cancer.

For over 20 years, she advocated on behalf of the female incarcerated residents in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. She presented carefully constructed studies and reports detailing truths about female incarceration and the likelihood of recidivism by female residents to audiences generally hesitant to affect change. Yet, she persisted.

Dr. Pitman ministered to the needs of the women in Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in numerous ways. She even chose to return to MBCC after being promoted to various prestigious positions at headquarters. Dr. Pitman managed the entirety of Mental Health Services here and at Eddie Warrior Correctional Center despite funding and staffing concerns, encouraging her people to follow her selfless example.

Recent statistics, provided by Christina Holloway, acting director of MBCC Mental Health Services, revealed that 69% of the Mabel Bassett residents have been involved with mental health services in the last 12 months. That is a high level of engagement for this specialized population.

Subsequent to her cancer diagnosis, Dr. Pitman continued her work. She had accrued an abundance of sick leave resulting from her workaholic personality, but even on leave, she stayed engaged with her staff. While

her immune system was compromised due to enduring horrible months of chemotherapy schedules and radiation treatments, she often worked from home. The ladies of MBCC were important to her.

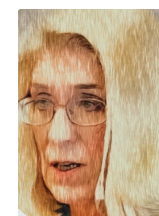
Dr. Pitman cared about the well-being of the patients in her care. To her, it did not matter that a woman was incarcerated nor why that individual was sentenced. Each patient deserved her protection and best efforts not only during counseling, but throughout the entirety of their experience in prison.

Working in conjunction with the Education Department at MBCC, Dr. Pitman established the Special Needs Education Program, an inmate-led tutoring program for those ladies unable to flourish in a traditional classroom setting. The program has assisted women to achieve their educational goals despite disabilities, illnesses or other challenges. In Dr. Pitman's honor and as a lasting legacy to her efforts, the program remains.

Dr. Pitman accomplished a thousand tasks of which the residents of Mabel Bassett will never be aware, but which benefitted them directly or indirectly.

The ladies of MBCC offer their prayers and appreciation to Dr. Pitman's family for sharing this beautiful soul and lovely human being with us. Most of us have personal stories of how this special woman positively impacted our lives. She is greatly loved. She will be missed.

Laura Pitman, Ph.D., Oklahoma Department of Corrections retiree, was



a respected long-time Mabel Bassett Mental Health Clinical Director whose work positively impacted the lives of our residents.

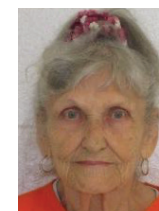
Jackie Spaulding

Jax | Editor

The Balance staff would like to acknowledge the passing of Jackie Spaulding, a resident of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center featured in our inaugural issue. In his article, "Tech support with a side of skunks," former staff writer Kolton Sanders, wrote about Jackie's struggle with technology. She had never even powered on her Securus tablet.

Beginning as a story about Jackie's inspirational and amusing attempts to adapt to new technology, the article ended on a poignant note about simpler times, the importance of real-life connections and Jackie's love of skunks. At 86, she was, at the time the story was published, the oldest resident at MBCC.

Jackie Spaulding, also known as "Grandma" by those residents closest to her, passed away on Jan. 22, 2025.



PERSONAL ESSAY

Real women

Crystal Avilla | Editor

Real women wake up with a full face of makeup, hair perfectly coiffed, ready to face the day. They work; but still they have plenty of time to cook and take care of the house. They are stylish, confident, and always ready with a witty comeback. The fairer sex can do anything, from changing the oil in the car to initiating world peace. Real women are wives and mothers, the best friend you can depend on to take you out for a drink when your ex is seen with someone better looking.

The stereotypical woman is a force to be reckoned with, capable of taking on the weight of the world. But is she real?

I grew up with an image borrowed from television and movies, where women were imperfect on purpose, for the sake of plot. To me, that was normal. Not like my dysfunctional family, which was a hot mess. At home, there was never a rite of passage where my mother taught me to apply makeup or helped me get ready for prom. There were never fond talks of a future wedding, and I never fantasized about what kind of mother I would be—I was too busy trying to survive. I was ashamed of where I came from and was convinced there was something wrong with me.

My teenage years were a blur. I never dated or went to a salon to get my hair done. By the age of 21, I was in jail for a crime that would earn me a life-without-parole sentence. Over the subsequent 26 years, I have felt isolated from people who are supposed to be my peers. Some look at me like I am from another planet because I cannot relate to certain things they experienced: dating, motherhood, the knowledge that at some point another person chose them to spend their life with. I will never know how to flirt in that self-assured way or go to a store and pick out a flattering outfit.

But is that really what being a woman is all about?

In recent years, I have accepted the fact that I will never be normal, nor do I care. I let go of past insecurities and recognized I have much more to offer than an outdated standard. I received a college degree and have published essays, articles, poems and short stories. Although I never wake up looking perfect, I stand up for what I think is right, challenge myself and am firmly convinced I deserve more out of life. I found acceptance among misfits and nerds. I may not be a wife or mother, but I do the best I can each day, always striving to reach beyond this fence and make a difference in the world.



Crystal Avilla, co-editor of The Mabel Bassett Balance, explores what being a woman means to her. (Photo courtesy of Lisa Loftus)

Parenting on the inside

Sharee Asberry | Editor

Children in the state of Oklahoma face many challenges following the absence of an incarcerated parent. Though a small fraction may have relatives care for them, the transition is never easy. The separation can cause mental, emotional, and even physical instability. The inability to process trauma can lead to anger, depression, rebellion, and / or suicide. I myself have witnessed sharp and gradual changes in the behavior of my own children and the children of my peers. The consequences they face are almost always heart-breaking.

To hear about the aftermath and not have control over it is hard. This is why, as incarcerated parents, our choices play a huge role in the future of our children.

Separation / Visitation

By my own observation, the unnatural separation of a child and their parents tends to leave a strain on the relationship. However, visitation privileges are used as possible bridges to mend

the gap. The process for some may begin great but may not end so well. When visitation is over, leaving can become traumatic for young children, rehashing the initial separation all over again. The screaming, crying or even physical contact may leave the incarcerated parent or caretaker in a place of uncertainty about future visits. Therefore, the minimal time given for incarcerated parents to nurture and care for their children should be less complicated.

Programs, counseling and less challenging protocols should be made more available within each facility. Focusing more on a purposeful and meaningful visit will help guide the course of each child's life.

Communication

During the children's maturation process, parents who have lengthy sentences witness different phases. This includes depression and other unusual behavior. "My children were five and 10 when I got locked up," MBCC resident Lisa Botone said one recent afternoon. "As they grew, there were times they became angry because they needed a mother when they hit puberty. They needed a mother when they liked a boy. And all I could do was tell them to keep that line of communication open. I would just listen to them. I will never judge them, and there is nothing they could do to make me not love them," said Botone.

It is important for the incarcerated parent to stay aware of such concerns. Keeping an open line of communication with their children is very important. Staying firm is a must. And remaining hopeful through the entire process is key. Real rehabilitation involves not

only the incarcerated parent, caregivers and the children, but the Department of Corrections, as well. A plan should be put into place for each incarcerated parent, regardless of their sentence, in order to work towards rehabilitation and reconciliation. A plan is a step toward healing. A plan will guide this generation and the next to a more positive future.

"It's not easy parenting. What matters to me the most is that my daughter is able to contact me when she needs me. There may have been times when I made some not-so-hot choices, but being a mother means more than being a prisoner," Botone said.

Stay Connected

It is important to stay connected to resources that help incarcerated parents stay on a positive track. At Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, there are numerous resources to help parents connect with their children. Oklahoma Messages, Girl Scouts and New Hope are a few of the programs that partner with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to help incarcerated parents build positive connections and meaningful interactions with their loved ones.



WORKSITE SPOTLIGHT

MBCC Library

Michelle Walker | Staff Writer

Our library staff is here for you. From left: Christina Nelson, Dana Langley, Jordan Keith, Tina Honeycutt, Mary Russell, Mary Fox, Supervisor Wanda Carder, Michelle King, Carol Gregory, Kelly Fairchild.

Whether you are looking for a book to wile away the hours or seeking help with your legal work, the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center library is the place to go. There, you can find the law library, a place to research new laws or Department of Corrections operations, as well as the leisure library that might hold your next favorite novel.

The law library aides are held to a high standard and are key to helping the women with their criminal legal matters, although they must work within policy when helping with legal cases. Michelle King, a law library clerk, said the favorite part of her job is "the puzzle, being able to help people solve problems that they couldn't solve for themselves. I love making a difference, even if it is small."

Although the law library has limitations for services they provide, Wanda Carder, MBCC library supervisor, said, "We want to help as much as we can. I can put myself in their—the inmates'— shoes.

It must be hard ... Everybody deserves to be acknowledged and heard, whether you are in orange or street clothes."

One of the most popular activities in prison is reading. A coveted book is like candy for the soul. Books are places of wonder, suspense, romance and thrills. No wonder that the MBCC leisure library is a high-traffic place.

Christina Nelson, a former leisure library worker and current law library clerk, reflected on what makes the library so important to the yard. She said "books are the place to get away from prison reality. It's something that we all need."

Reading can help you explore your curiosity or just provide a much-needed distraction. Carder encourages everyone to read. She believes that a person can engage their dreams by reading a book.

Be sure to go to the library and check out the services there. As you leave, thank the workers for providing such a valuable resource to our yard.