



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



PRESS RELEASE

Date: April 4, 2014
Contact: Jasmine C. Cole

Phone: (601) 359-5689
Email: jccole@mdoc.state.ms.us

FREE VIEWING IN MADISON OF EX-OFFENDER'S STORY OF REDEMPTION

JACKSON – A documentary about a Mississippi ex-offender recently released from prison and now trying to help others will be shown free of charge on Saturday at the Malco Grandview Cinema, 221 Grandview Blvd., Madison, MS 39110, at 5 p.m.

The film “Will to Change” will be followed by a 45-minute panel discussion about re-entry at 6 p.m.

William Kozielski Jr., the subject of the film, will be present at the screening and will be one of the panelists.

Kozielski, 29, a self-described ex-gangster, has been in the prison system since 2009. He was released on probation in 2013 from an aggravated assault conviction in 2010 in Rankin County. He has since worked as a volunteer firefighter, youth mentor, a coach for a girls’ softball team, among other community activities.

The documentary is by Alison Fast of Barefoot Workshops and is set in Clarksdale, Mississippi where Kozielski resides with his son and girlfriend.

“The film portrays a situation where an offender who has been through the prison system time and time again, finally decides to change his path, from one of crime and destruction to one of redemption,” said Commissioner Christopher B. Epps.

Fast, program director of Barefoot Workshops, said, “My vision for this film is that it will be used as an intervention tool throughout prison programming in the state of Mississippi, as well as in the community of Clarksdale to address root causes of violence.”

Both the screening and the discussion are open to the public.

According to Fast, 73 percent of the children in Clarksdale live in single-parent families. “The pattern of broken homes and missing fathers - anger and recidivism repeats itself, and it's time to break the cycle with innovative solutions - and "change stories" that model successful re-entry,” said Fast.

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In addition to Kozielski, the panelists will include:

- **Jerry Williams:** Deputy Commissioner of Community Correction, MDOC
- **Betty Lou Jones:** Member of the Mississippi Parole Board
- **Rev. Sally Fran Ross:** Methodist pastor who leads a support group for those who have family members incarcerated
- **Shae Williams:** Executive Director for the Mississippi Faith Based Coalition
- **Trisha Taylor:** William's mom, leader of a prison ministry in response to his incarceration
- **Eddie Spencer:** a former MDOC inmate who is now an author, preacher, and motivational speaker

Fast said, “My primary motive is to encourage William to stay on his path and inspire other parolees (probationers) to know that they don't have to have a perfect track record to make a difference in their community.”

Another result of the documentary is that Linda Keena, associate professor of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi, will be developing evidence-based research to explore the cognitive impacts of storytelling.

“I believe this film will help to break new ground in the field of media and social change, and move the dial on recidivism. My hope is that it will be used as a positive intervention tool for years to come and impact thousands of lives,” Fast said. “William is one person, but everyone has a story. With repeated exposure to positive stories, I believe inmates can learn key behaviors and responses that will help them to “flip” their stories into the positive.”

MDOC, which contributed to the funding of the film, plans to show the film to offenders upon their entry and release. “Lowering the recidivism rate in Mississippi has always been one of my top priorities,” Epps said. “Less recidivism means saving taxpayer money as well as successfully rehabilitating and helping former inmates get on the right track.”

Fast is a Peabody Award-winning producer. She worked on the “Will to Change” project with Chandler Griffin, a Mississippi native, who is now a New York City-based, documentary filmmaker, educator and the Founding Director of Barefoot Workshops.

Epps said, “Prison is often considered a place for punishment. However, for many it can also be a place for rehabilitation and another chance at life. Change takes effort, strength and will power. You must be willing to change. If you are willing, you will become able.”

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Media Note: For information on “Will to Change” visit its Facebook page at [facebook.com/WillToChange](https://www.facebook.com/WillToChange) and/or website at www.W2Cmovie.com.