



An Evening with Wally Lamb July 22

Bestselling Author Shares Insights from Imprisoned Women

Wally Lamb has hit the best seller list with three books, two of which were picks for Oprah’s Book Club, but it’s the heart wrenching results of his writing workshops with the women of York Correctional Institution in Connecticut that he will talk about during *An Evening with Wally Lamb*. The evening will be hosted by the women of the Benedict Center on July 22 from 5:00 to 7:30 PM at the Warehouse, 818 S. Water Street.



Wally Lamb pictured with his York Correctional Institution writing group.

Lamb has said he was a little reluctant at first when invited to teach a writing workshop at the institution, but he soon became an unrelenting advocate for the women and the life-changing power they discovered in the written word, and he will recount his struggle to get their writings published.

“There are misconceptions to be abandoned, biases to be dropped,” Lamb says. “To imprison a woman is to remove her voice from the world, but many female inmates have been silenced by life long before the transport van carries them from the courthouse to the correctional facility,” Lamb writes in his powerful introduction to *Couldn’t Keep it To Myself; Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters*.

“In this unforgettable collection, the women of York describe in their own words how they were imprisoned by abuse, rejection, and their own self-destructive impulses long before they entered the criminal justice system. Yet these are powerful stories of hope and healing, told by writers who have left victimhood behind,” one reviewer notes.

Lamb will talk about his incredible journey with the women of York, as well as talk informally with guests about all of his writing during the reception. Copies of Lamb’s books, including *Couldn’t Keep it to Myself* and *I’ll Fly Away*, will be available for purchase, or bring in your own copies to be autographed between 5 and 5:30 or at the end of the evening.

To join Lamb and the women of the Benedict Center July 22, contact Peggy at 414-347-1774 x210 or register online at www.benedictcenter.org. Tickets are \$60 for one or \$50 each for two or more.

Jail Deferred Transforms to Success Achieved

The fastest growing segment of the Women’s Program is Second Chance, serving women with Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs) – 150 women so far this year. To date, 97% of those who participate committedly succeed in fulfilling their contracts and meeting all of their court obligations. Most are rewarded with the words “case dismissed” at their final court appearance.

A DPA is a second chance for women, recommended by the District Attorney after screening and file review with the police and Public Defender. It’s a chance for each to avoid prosecution, perhaps have her case dismissed, and participate in a minimum of six months of education, treatment or counseling that can shift her life from prison-bound to forward-bound.

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This June’s graduates, (left to right) Niya Young, Lisa O’Neill and Matavia McKinney, earn their GED degrees. Pictured with MATC Instructor Jim Kennedy and BC Coordinator of Academic Instruction, Dave Peters.

Success Works Arms Women for Challenging Job Search

Wisconsin's Special Legislative Committee on Justice Reinvestment Oversight found that only 18% of men and women released from prison in this state are employed. Only 11% of women at the Benedict Center are currently employed.

With so many people looking for work right now, the search is even harder for women with minimal skills, not much of a work record and, worst of all, a criminal record, especially if it is for prostitution or drugs.

The employment problem is further compounded by racial disparity, which was documented by the landmark research Deva Pager conducted working out of the Benedict Center in 2002 before joining the faculty of Princeton University. Her research revealed Milwaukee employers would hire a white man with a felony record rather than a black man with none, when both presented the same skill set and experience. The research was later replicated with similar disturbing results by Concordia University Director Lenard Wells (a former Benedict Center Community Justice Director).

Overlay this discouraging scenario with the New York Bar Association's 2007 *Taskforce on Employment Opportunities for the Formerly Incarcerated* that documented an individual's likelihood of committing a crime is directly correlated with work status.

Success Works, the Center's re-engineered job preparation program, addresses this problem by giving motivated women the opportunity to gain the skills and confidence they need to enter the workforce. Participation in this select group must be earned and sustained. To gain entry into the program, each woman must maintain an attendance record of 90% in prior program commitments and demonstrate continued progress toward goals.

Customer service training adapted for individuals growing up in contemporary urban culture provides communication exercises, hones interpersonal skills and practices problem-solving strategies. Customer service is becoming a lost art – one that BC women can revive and revitalize for the benefit of businesses small and large. Additionally, conflict resolution training helps women avoid the pitfalls that can occur in the workplace – and everyday life.

To guide their job search in a direction that correlates with their own interests and skills, women prepare for success with self-guided assessments.

Working with computers provided by MATC, women learn to present their experiences positively as they develop resumes in

computer training classes, learn how to research businesses on the Internet and establish email accounts to apply for many opportunities that are online only.

Success Works is a small, individualized program aimed at helping women who become lost and discouraged in the larger job centers where one size never fits all. To date, nine women have earned their way into the program.



Role-playing as interviewees, Latoya (left) and Patricia (right) practice selling their personal value to potential employers.

Latoya has worked at the State Fair cream puff concession in past years. This summer, she will be working as a supervisor, with the confidence and knowledge of how to do this successfully. She is in the process of seeking a permanent job to begin in fall, with the long-term goal of opening a beauty shop

Patricia has decided to focus on a career in day care and has completed her state application forms. She is well on her way to completing her GED and is continuing her education in early childhood education. She hopes one day to own a day care of her own.

Take Five for Rational Justice

Rational Justice Minutes delivers very brief perspectives on current justice issues of local interest by email each month, beginning next month.

RJ Minutes grabs news from the headlines, then provides the Benedict Center perspective or actions along with links to more information or direct involvement. Below is a sample of what *Rational Justice Minutes* will offer. To subscribe, visit www.benedictcenter.org.

DE FOREST, Wis. — Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett said Tuesday he has “serious reservations” about a new program that allows nonviolent inmates to be released early for good behavior.

Barrett, who is running for governor as a Democrat, said he would review the program if elected but stopped short of saying whether he would seek to repeal it. Both major Republican candidates, Scott Walker and Mark Neumann, oppose the early release program and want to repeal it. — *LaCrosse Tribune* May 4, 2010

Earned release exemplifies What Works in corrections . . .

Earned release is an exemplary corrections management tool enabling nonviolent inmates to apply for release to community supervision if they have complied with all recommended programming and meet criteria established by the sentencing authority.

Wisconsin's harsh Truth in Sentencing law initially wiped out this evidence-based correctional best practice, which encourages inmates to set goals and use time productively while incarcerated so they are better prepared to succeed when they return home.

Learn more at a forum at 7 PM August 10, sponsored by MICAH, co-sponsored by the Benedict Center and others at New Hope Baptist Church, 2343 W. Roosevelt Dr., Milwaukee.

DPAs Provide Second Chance Continued from Page 1



Patricia (featured in *Success* story, page 2) grabbed the opportunity for a second chance and so dramatically changed her life while with the Benedict Center that the District Attorney and judge both commended her when she returned to court for the last time to learn her case was being dismissed.

“She stayed with the program for nearly 10 months, working so hard to get herself job training and get into MATC where she is now. She’s a whole new person, extremely dedicated, making commitments and following through,” says Donna Hietpas, Program Director. “Her first court date, she almost didn’t go, she was so scared. The last time she went in strutting, she was so proud because she had done everything ordered, plus so much more,” Hietpas said.



Niya just earned her GED and participated in the MATC graduation ceremonies for adult learners last month. She came to the Benedict Center with a DPA 18 months ago and now wants to return as a volunteer to help other women. Her success and compliance enabled her to have a felony drug charge reduced to a misdemeanor, to which she pled guilty and was given credit for time served.

Because all criminal records are open to public view on the Internet through the state’s Consolidated Court Automation Program, having a charge dismissed or reduced from a felony can have a big impact on job prospects, housing and even student aid.

Thirteen women who have completed their DPAs for felony offenses this year have done so well that their cases were dismissed, and three others had their charges reduced. DPAs are considered for nonviolent offenses, and women referred to the Benedict Center typically have charges that involve many variations of drug possession or trafficking, forgery, theft or prostitution.

One of the few problems with Second Chance is funding. Many of the women need significant Center services as well as fairly intensive case management. The court system provides no funding, so there is no sure source of revenue to underwrite this growing success story.



Counselors Open Doors to Change

Counseling, monitoring progress and serving as a liaison with attorneys, Meagan Winn guides women through the actions to successful completion of a Deferred Prosecution Agreement. Winn joined the Benedict Center almost two years ago as a Trinity Fellow at Marquette University. She completed a Masters in Public Service with a concentration in criminal justice administration this May and has joined the Benedict Center staff to run the Second Chance component of the Women’s Program.

“Over time, program participation moves beyond simply satisfying court requirements and becomes something more – an opportunity for women to gain coping skills, education and insight to help themselves stay out of the criminal justice system in the future,” Winn explains. “Once participants are able to see the DPA process as an *opportunity* rather than just a criminal sanction, tremendous growth can occur. Several DPA participants have gone above and beyond what the court requires of them and have taken the initiative to provide victims with apologies and strengthen their positive relationships and support systems while reducing risk factors, as well as acquire additional educational and vocational skills,” she adds.

Graduate student interns are invaluable to the program, and this summer Melissa Dietrich, a public interest law student who will begin her third year at the University of Wisconsin Law School this fall, is working with Winn as a Second Chance counselor. “I have seen the harm and waste that has gone along with sending offenders to prison who have a strong potential to be rehabilitated,” Dietrich says. “When women come out of prison with a felony conviction, they have not received the mental, emotional or educational help that they need and are significantly more likely to reoffend. Not to mention that the cost per year to keep offenders in prison is in the ballpark of \$30,000 *per person*. It is not only more humane but much more cost effective to help offenders improve their lives and stay out of prison permanently.”

Jail Chaplain Promotes National Reentry Conference October 7-10

Benedict Center Jail Chaplain Catherine Sidney is deeply involved in planning the 9th Annual National Prisoner Reentry Conference, which comes to Milwaukee October 7-10 at the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee, 333 W. Kilbourn Ave. With a theme of *Justice & Mercy, Maintaining Balance in Prisoner Reentry*, the conference is sponsored by the Christian Association for Prison Aftercare (CAPA), Amachi, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Prison Aftercare Network of Wisconsin, in collaboration with the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative.

More than 23 workshops cover topics ranging from *Evidence-Based*

Practices to Living with the Label (for sex offenders and their families) to *Females: Understanding their Hearts & Addressing their Needs*.

In a unique collaboration, the Fatherhood Initiative is offering a free conference at the same time for men and women returning home that includes a health fair, job fair, assistance with child support debt reduction and drivers license recovery.

For more information or to register for one or both conferences, visit www.milwaukeefatherhood.com or call 414-286-5653.

Gifts of Grace, Thanks of Praise

Hygiene Products for Healthy Living

As a Lenten project, **St. Mary Catholic Faith Community** in Hales Corners provided a wonderful array of beauty and hygiene products, giving our women little rewards of luxury in recognition of their efforts. The Sisters Project also shares this generous contribution with women working the streets for prostitution to help develop a relationship that will lead these women to seek help from the Benedict Center and make major changes in their lives. Kind thanks to **Board member Jamie Lewiston**, who has also donated high-end beauty supplies and other incentives that let each woman know she is special.

Big Fun under the Big Top

Fourteen Benedict Center women, their children and grandchildren enjoyed the Tripoli Shrine Circus and entered a world of magic full of clowns, animals and acrobats thanks to a greatly appreciated donation of 50 tickets from **Tripoli Shrine**.

Helping Readers Read

The small lending library of books by and of interest to women, is growing nicely at the Benedict Center with recent donations from **Trinity Presbyterian Church, Mary Stetson** and members of the **Older Women's League**. Staff encourage the women to browse, borrow and even keep books that speak to them personally.

Combining Fun and Fundraising

What happens when a bunch of 16-Inch Softball aficionados get together for their annual game? A great day for a great cause. Each year the **16-Inch Society** selects a nonprofit agency to support with their annual ball game. The result? The Benedict Center was the recipient of nearly \$9,000 through their generosity.

Transportation Crisis

The cost of public transportation is at a crisis level for low income women court ordered to treatment and other services in Milwaukee. Many Benedict Center women can't afford \$4.50 a day or \$16.50 for a weekly pass to pay their own way on a County bus. With about 60 active clients a week, this is a cost beyond the reach of the Benedict Center. So, there is tremendous gratitude for the generous special needs grant from the **Faye McBeath Foundation** and the donation of actual bus tickets by **Trinity Presbyterian Church**.



Cooking Healthy, Cooking Right

It was a five year wait, but the Benedict Center kitchen finally has a stove with many thanks to the **Faye McBeath Foundation** and **St. Matthews Evangelical Lutheran Church**. BC women try new healthy recipes and adapt old favorites to a healthier standard for the monthly Awards Luncheons and midday snacks.



On a recent visit Cathy Jess, Warden of Wisconsin Women's Correctional System, talks with students in Dave Peter's classroom.

Mother's Day Tributes Help Benedict Center Women

Thanks to all who donated to our Mother's Day Campaign. In all, 67 donors contributed nearly \$6,000 in support of the women who come to the Benedict Center to create safe and sober lives for themselves and their families.

In Honor of:

Irene Hietpas, by Ron and Donna Hietpas
Shannon McNally, by Kit McNally
Roma Foldy, by Kit McNally
Kit McNally, by Joel McNally
Peggy MacArthur, by Micah MacArthur
Jean Snyder, by Peggy MacArthur
Anne Luber, by Elizabeth Vogt
Jeanette Mische, by Lisa Koneazny
Janet Miller, by Richard and Barbara Bosley,
 Scott and Kate Bosley, and Shauna Miller, Jonathon and Rachel Laven

In Memory of:

Grace Utech, by Mary Pat and Don Utech
Kay DelaHunt, by John Pandl
 The loved ones of Robert Bates
Denise Staudacher, by Paul and Laura Weisman
 The parents of Ronald and Marion Sopa
Maralyn Mejchar, by Kathleen Martin
Helen Sheahan, by Florence Waterston



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Consider a Bequest for Justice and Pledge to Make a Difference

A Special Donor Within

Inspired by the Benedict Center's Mother's Day appeal she was stuffing into envelopes for mailing this spring, Cora surprised staff with a very generous financial contribution of her own to help her peers who were working hard to reunite their families.

Cora came to the Benedict Center last October to fulfill court-ordered community service hours, but she's done much more to help herself and others since she arrived.



"Give and receive has always been my belief," she said, explaining her decision to donate dollars as well as time. "Any way I can help, I will."

"Education is my main goal, the most important thing in my life right now, then a job," Cora explains, as she heads off to GED classes at the Center.

"I love this place. Everyone has been really helpful. I've had a lot of support from friends and staff since I've been here. I know I need the support. Right now, I'd rather be here than anywhere." An inspiring testimonial from a participant, a volunteer and a very valued donor.

A Little Each Month Adds Up

"Why not give up buying lunch out once a month so someone who needs help will get it?" asks Samuel Johnson, co-founder of Community Brainstorming, a vibrant forum that has been challenging community leaders on issues affecting Milwaukee's African American Community for 25 years.



The money Johnson saves from that skipped lunch comes to the Benedict Center each month to help a woman learn to help herself live free of criminal involvement.

Johnson says he was impressed with what happens at the Benedict Center for a long time and decided several years ago he could help the cause in a greater way by giving a little each month. He urges others who care, but believe they can't afford to contribute, to consider adopting his method of contributing what he calls "a little change" for the sake of making a bigger change in the community through the work of the Benedict Center, work he considers "fantastic."

The Benedict Center is part of the Community Shares of Greater Milwaukee workplace campaign and is an eligible United Way write-in. Periodic deductions directly from a credit card on any convenient schedule is another easy and effective way to give. For more information on monthly giving, contact Cindy at 414-347-1774 or go to www.benedictcenter.org.

You Can't Take it With You

By Atty. John Flanagan, former Board President

We've all heard that refrain somewhere. That phrase has special meaning today in our economic times. Charitable giving surveys show the vast majority of funds raised in this country for charitable endeavors come from individuals (75% of total funds). Recent surveys indicate charitable donations have fallen 13.5% for human services during these difficult economic times. The Benedict Center obviously is not immune to this trend.



One way to assist in future funding to help maintain the increasingly necessary services the Benedict Center provides is to revisit your estate plan and determine what amounts may be appropriate to donate to the Benedict Center, or any other worthy organization, for that matter.

So yes, it is true, that "you can't take it with you when you go . . .," but you can determine where it goes. For many, this also raises the question, what **do** you get to take when you go? While we each have to answer that question in our own hearts, for me it is the satisfaction of knowing I did what I reasonably could because I believe you get to take the love with you – as much as your heart can hold.

Saint Moves On, Jenkins Steps Up for Community Service

As Coordinator of the Restorative Community Service Project for the Benedict Center at the Community Justice Resource Center, Wilbert St. Julien, Jr., better known as "Saint," worked urban gardens with his team and provided labor at Growing Power, Will Allen's urban farm. Saint is now working with Allen, who was designated as one of the 100 most influential people by *Time* magazine, helping him train crews of young people to expand the urban farm movement throughout Milwaukee.

James Jenkins, former basketball star with the Buck's MAC Fund team, teacher, and coach, is taking over the restorative community service team and will continue to take the CJRC team to work on the farm every Friday. Other regular work sites include graffiti removal for the City, stocking and serving at food pantries, helping at homeless shelters, building with Habitat for Humanity and constructing scratching posts for the Wisconsin Humane Society.

The Benedict Center will soon be surveying all worksites the restorative community service teams have served over the last five



Restorative Community Service teams from the CJRC serve Growing Power.

years, with additional sites and a quarterly rotation schedule under consideration. For more information or to suggest a work project, contact James at 414-933-1516 x243

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Thank you for your support and interest in justice. Please share this newsletter with friends and colleagues.

Volunteer Highlight : Mary Pat Utech

Mary Pat's volunteer work transitions over time



“When I started as a tutor at the Benedict Center, I knew this was where I wanted to spend my volunteer time. Working with the women here has given me so much more than I could ever give to them. I admire their resolve to change their lives against tremendous odds. I am thrilled to be a small positive part of their lives. We are all sisters and I love to see them change as they grow.”

Over the past six years, Utech has worn many hats. Initially a GED tutor, she transitioned into the volunteer Volunteer Coordinator position. Over time, she has carved out a new role for herself as part-time bookkeeper — leaving an open volunteer position to fill. The Volunteer Coordinator helps match the talents and skills of other volunteers with the needs of the Benedict Center.

To view this and other volunteer opportunities, see our website at www.benedictcenter.org.

Upcoming Appointments with Justice

July 22, Thursday evening 5 to 7:30 PM. *An Evening with Wally Lamb*, hosted by the women of the Benedict Center, at the Warehouse/Hot Water, 818 S. Water St.

July 29, August 26 and September 30. *Monthly Awards Luncheon*, Benedict Center Women's Harm Reduction Program, Noon at the Center, free. To RSVP, contact Janet at 414-347-1774 x220.

August 10, Tuesday evening from 6 to 7:30 PM. *What's All Right About Earned Release*, sponsored by MICAHA, co-sponsored by the Benedict Center and others, at New Hope Baptist Church, 2324 W. Roosevelt, Milwaukee. For more information contact, Kit at kit@benedictcenter.org.

October 14, Thursday evening. *Two Stories: Benedict Center Women Speak*, a benefit dinner with silent and live auction, sponsored by the Friends of the Benedict Center at Brynwood Country Club. For more information, contact Ellie at 414-258-6513 or Marialyce at 414-810-1057.

November 6, Saturday morning. *The Solution is Our Community*, resolving the conflicts of racism and criminal justice at the root, sponsored by the First Unitarian Society Racial Justice Task Force and the Benedict Center at First Unitarian Church, Astor and Ogden, Milwaukee. For more information, contact Kit at kit@benedictcenter.org.

December 3, Friday all day. *The Drug Problem in Wisconsin*, Wisconsin State Bar, Madison. For more information contact, Rachel Kurtz at Rachel@vcl.org.