



VJJA Meritorious Award in the Area of Community Service 2021

Fran Bolin and Assisting Families
of Inmates (AFOI)

Our award winner graduated from Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work and a Minor in Religion and from Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, with Master of Social Work degree.

She is the Executive Director of Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI). AFOI is a nonprofit organization based in Richmond, VA, and dedicated to providing opportunities for regular and meaningful visitation, referrals to community services that help families cope with incarceration and prepare for release, and reunification. AFOI was created in 1978 as a volunteer transportation program designed to assist Richmond area families visiting relatives in state prisons. Within 15 years of beginning, AFOI was providing transportation to 15 state prisons, hot meals when family members returned from visiting and supportive outreach services.

In the early 2000's, under the leadership of our award winner, AFOI began partnering with the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) to provide transportation services to families visiting Bon Air and Beaumont JCCs. Over the next few years, the partnership expanded to include providing assistance to DJJ youth and their families in need of resources such as lodging, clothing and other supplies necessary to be successful in the community.

The most recent partnership, the HEARTY program, provides funding to support medical visits (Physical and Mental Health) Co-Pays, transportation to/from Medical/Health/Mental Health appointments, other payments to address the gap between reentry date and active Medicaid coverage, necessary supplies for employment and education; and urgent assistance for food, clothing, utilities (partial pay) and/or rent/eviction (partial pay).

To date, AFOI has served hundreds of youths and families. Some examples of the assistance they have provided include paying for hotels for out of town families to participate in direct care treatment team meetings and visitation, purchasing work boots and back braces for youth to sustain employment,

purchasing laptops for youth participating in educational programs and paying for tattoo removal of a youth denouncing gang participation.

A family person, our recipient loves her community and tries to give back wherever she can. She believes, "Giving back is truly a combination of time, talent, and treasure, and says "I am grateful for the opportunities to do so!" Her love for fellow humans led our recipient to volunteer on boards, co-found philanthropic giving circles, and organize fundraising events, which eventually led to assisting families of inmates financially, socially, and emotionally.

Our recipient grew up in a household that valued family, faith, compassion, respect, and community. She and her sister were taught to be grateful for what they received and the importance of helping the less fortunate. She has previously reminisced, "My parents' primary message was to go forth and do better for humanity. At a very early age, my mother had us going up and down the street to collect for the American Heart Association and other organizations. My parents made sure that we contributed and had well-rounded experiences with exposure to many different areas of life and the community."

Our recipient has faced many challenges during her career. In addition to the social hurdles of age, gender, and race, she also had to go through the conventional challenges that come with running a non-profit organization – funding, development, growth, and staffing. Describing her challenges, she says, "Over two decades I have come to learn that we are not a cause that all can understand. I have learned to flex and adapt, but I have also learned to stand my ground. We must advocate for the families we serve, and sometimes that requires a more difficult position".

For all of these reasons and more, please join me in congratulating our

**2021 VJJA Meritorious Award Winner in the
Area of Community Service is:**

FRAN BOLIN
and Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI)