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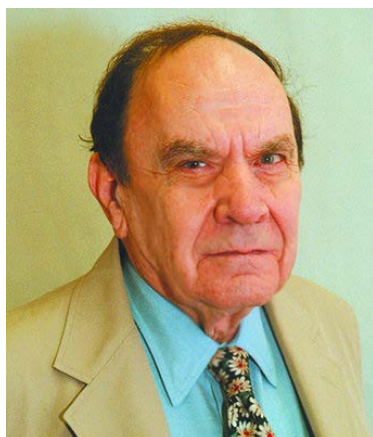
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## Bill Kinney: Charity works hard at reconnecting families

by Bill Kinney  
Columnist

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Bill Kinney

a major supporter of the non-profit group Reconnecting Families.

Here are some facts this columnist bets you didn't know:

- 17 percent of males and 24 percent of females in Georgia prisons were sentenced on drug charges, and 68 percent of incarcerated persons have a drug or alcohol addiction.
- A 2006 assessment on drug endangered children by Applied Research Services found 65 percent of child deprivation cases in Georgia involve parents either manufacturing or abusing drugs.
- The cost to house an adult inmate is \$46 per day.
- The cost to house a juvenile is \$200 per day.

Those numbers come courtesy of Marietta attorney Justin O'Dell, whose firm, Cauthorn, Nohr & O'Dell, is

Fortunately, Cobb has established a Family Dependency Treatment Court and a Juvenile Drug Court to help address such needs. The first deals with child deprivation cases when one or both parents have substance abuse problems. It helps the parent(s) deal with addiction and regain custody of their children. The second deals with juvenile offenders with drug related arrests. The average recidivism rate of drug court grads is just 12 percent, compared to close to 70 percent for other drug offenders.

"But in Cobb County, we are 45 for 45," in terms of those who have completed the program and stayed straight, O'Dell told the Marietta Kiwanis Club on Thursday, at which he was guest speaker.

Furthermore, 95 percent of its graduates are employed and 18 of them have gone on to receive their GED.

There are various Drug Court and Juvenile Court programs already, but they and the women who needed residential housing and inpatient treatment under the Mothers Making a Change program cannot accept funding from private sources or foundations because they are governmental programs.

"There was a gap in this. And recognizing that, a few of us formed a 501(c)3 called Reconnecting Families as the charitable partner to the others," O'Dell said.

"We fund GED classes for the ladies and juveniles; we have paid for life coaches to come in and work with them, we have paid for them to go on activities. We also have a complete donation of clothes and other basic items to help women with the transition."

Let's take the typical woman or juvenile who enters the program. The woman would most likely lose temporary custody of her children. She would be evaluated and in 90 percent of the cases, be placed in inpatient treatment at MMAC. She begins intensive rehab and counseling for addiction and often for domestic abuse.

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"At this point, we would like to let her see her children if she earns it. However, there is no money," O'Dell said.

So Reconnecting Families might step in with movie passes, tickets to a soccer game or partner with a church to host a pizza and movie night.

"As she progresses, she starts coming to the weekly Celebrating Families Dinners. Again, these dinners would not occur without RF. These dinners are vital to the mental and emotional well-being of the children going through this. Neither the state nor the county provides funding for counselors for them," he said.

Then, as she progresses, she moves into an apartment and gets her children back, and is required to get a job.

"In addition, we will send out a call," he said. "Within a day or two, we will probably locate her some bedroom and baby furniture, living room items and a washer and dryer."

Then after she graduates, Reconnecting Families will keep tabs on her. The process is similar for juvenile participants, although somewhat less involved, depending on the parental situation.

Among those closely involved in the program are Juvenile Court Judge Juanita Stedman, Reconnecting Families director Jennifer Farmer and board chairwoman Nurdan Cornelius of Cobb EMC.

The program has many success stories, some of whom were at the meeting. One was Peggy Snider, now a board member of RF, whose son graduated from the program in 2007 and now has completed two years of college at Chattahoochee Tech.

"Peggy recently remarried and very generously asked guests to donate to Reconnecting Families in lieu of giving her gifts," O'Dell said.

Another was Cher Randall, a one-time schoolteacher in west Cobb who lost her job, her husband, her children and her house to drugs and alcohol.

"She was one of our first graduates and is a true star," O'Dell said of her. "She's now approaching 2,000 days sober - nearly five years."

Yet another there was Vicky Stoker, who started using alcohol and drugs at 13 and who later used methamphetamine throughout her pregnancy. She completed the program two years ago and has been clean for more than 700 days. She has no contact with her child's father, who is still an addict.

And Young Bonnie Pintur was a cheerleading captain at Walton High who had started drinking at 12. The recovering alcoholic is now a student at Kennesaw State University and was the recipient of the Babe Atkins Byrne Scholarship and the YWCA Scholarship. Oh - and she's cheering again.

And so are those who know about Reconnecting Families.

To help, contact Farmer at (770) 528-2291 or email [jennifer.farmer@cobbcounty.org](mailto:jennifer.farmer@cobbcounty.org)

*Bill Kinney is associate editor of the Marietta Daily Journal.*