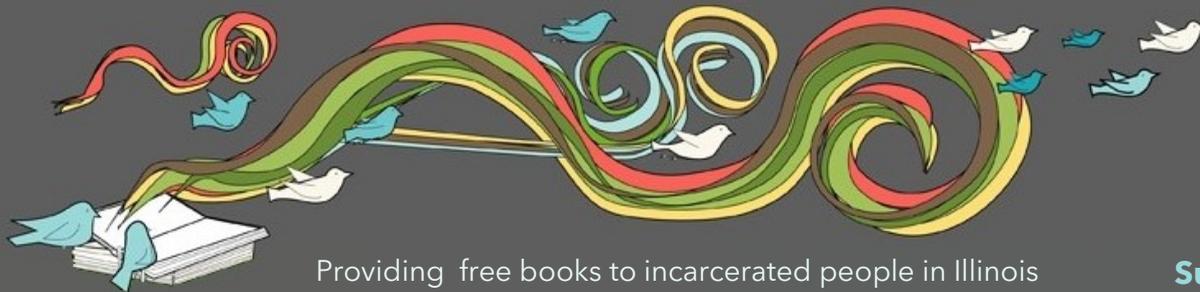


# URBANA-CHAMPAIGN BOOKS TO PRISONERS



independent  
media center

Summer 2021 Newsletter



Providing free books to incarcerated people in Illinois

The mission of Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners is to provide free books to people incarcerated in Illinois and to promote education about incarceration and prisons.

## UPDATES & HIGHLIGHTS

- The re-opening of the two **county jail libraries** last fall was short-lived. Currently there is access for patrons but without volunteer librarians to keep track of books and organize shelves. Volunteers continue to deliver books and other materials to the jails weekly.

- We are planning a **Fall book sale for Oct 16-17 2021**. The sale will be held over a two-day period in conjunction with the IMC's grand reopening. We sell donated books that are generally not requested by prisoners or are too heavy to mail. This regular fundraiser helps to cover operational costs, including mailings.

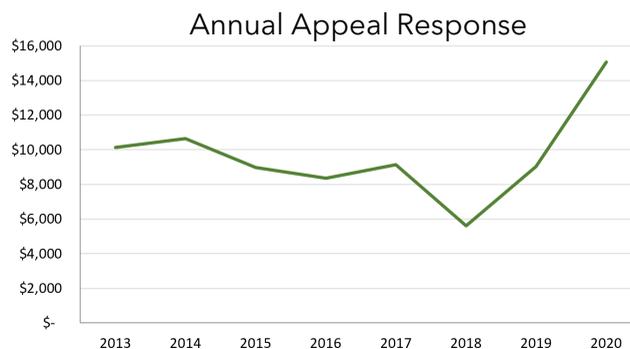
- Two Champaign Rotary Clubs have funded **bulk purchases of GED study books!** GED study books are constantly requested, but rarely donated. This fills one of the large holes in our book collection. Let us know if you want to help fill other holes!

## A RECORD BREAKING RESPONSE!

Rachel Rasmussen

Every November we send out an appeal letter, inviting people to continue to support the mission to keep good books accessible to incarcerated people in Illinois. We were prepared, however, for the effects of COVID19 on everyone's lives. So when the results were tallied this spring, you could have blown us over with a feather.

Together we raised \$15,055 – the largest amount our November appeal letter has ever brought in. *(continued on page 4)*



## BOOKS: INSPIRATION AND FUEL FOR CHANGE

James Winston, Volunteer



James began volunteering around 2013. He poses here in his Service Barber Shop in Urbana.

I still remember my lottery number: 134. It was low, a guarantee that I would be drafted. I was never interested in leaving Champaign-Urbana to see the world. Nevertheless, at the age of 22, I found myself homesick and lonely, fighting a war in Vietnam. Some big city boys assured me that there was something to ease my pain, and indeed it did. I returned from Vietnam addicted to heroin. It took many years to change that; many setbacks, including five

**Prison teaches you to persevere, but you may persevere going in the wrong direction. A book can provide the chance of finding the right direction.**

sentences to prison. I never could figure out how to really change. In 2006, having broken some rule, I was placed in "the hole" with a Bible to keep me company. So, I read it, I read it every day. The Bible poured faith into me. Faith helped me change. I could no longer live only for myself. I volunteer at Books to Prisoners because I know first-hand that a book can provide the inspiration and fuel for change. Prison time does not have to be lost time. It can provide a time of reflection, of figuring out who you are and who you want *(continued on page 4)*

## FIRST VIRTUAL AUCTION & RAFFLE FUNDRAISER

by Anna H. and Rachel S. (Volunteers)

This February, UC Books to Prisoners held its first ever virtual auction and raffle! Since the pandemic cancelled three of our regular fundraiser book sales we needed try something else to keep the books available to prisoners. So we formed a small task force, and hatched the idea of an online auction. We reached out to the community to donate items to auction and raffle, but we never expected the level of support we received.

We are incredibly grateful for all of the help, especially with the challenges COVID 19 was creating for everyone. Several local businesses and creators donated items for the event:

art coop inc., Enchantment Alley, Glow by Lola, Human Kinetics, Kiri Made, Plant Mode, Red Herring Vegetarian Restaurant, The Upper Bout, and Zainab Susi.

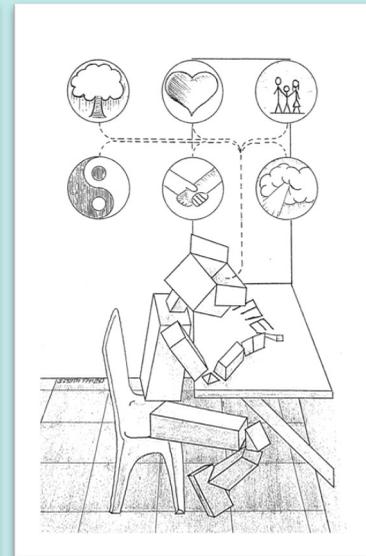
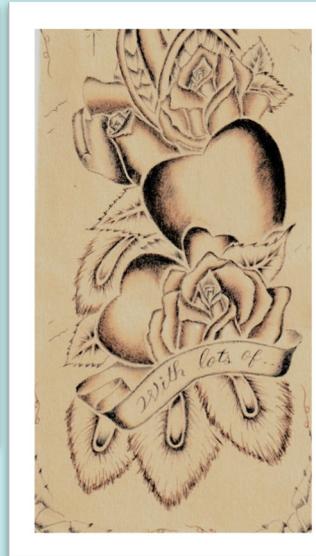
**We are incredibly grateful for all of the help, especially with the challenges COVID 19 was creating for everyone.**

Many of these organizations are new partners for us, and we reached many new donors because of them. Though it was a lot of work, the auction and raffle were a success thanks to their generosity; it raised needed funds and increased community awareness around the work Books to Prisoners does.

The funds raised will contribute to shipping costs to over 25 Illinois prisons and toward improving the book collections in the lending libraries we run in both county jails.

Thank you to all who organized this event, donated, bid or purchased raffle tickets! And stay tuned—we may try this again next year!

## GIFTS OF ART AND HAND MADE GREETING CARDS FROM INCARCERATED READERS



Artists L to R: JC, Francis O'Campos, Anonymous, Leo Cardez.

## "DEAR BOOKS TO PRISONERS . . ."

I've been written to you since 2014. I appreciate the books I've received from this organization. A lot of those books help me get through some tough challenges over the years. Those books also help change my way of thinking. I now have 3 years left before I returned back home to my love ones. I am working on starting my own business on the real estate side. But I need so help finding the right type of books.

I greatly appreciate the last set of books sent. The guys and I that share books had a lot of fun dialoguing and sharing insights for weeks at a time. I am writing you requesting more books to grow from. Enclosed are 6 authors/subjects we would like to discuss. If you have anything related to these topics I thank you sincerely if you would send them. I look forward to hearing from you.

Authors  
Leon Trotsky  
Sir Francis Bacon  
Sojourner Truth  
Lao Tzu  
Confucius  
Kwame Nkrumah

Subjects  
Sumerian Civilization  
Egyptian Civilization  
Vegan Protein Sources  
Spiritual practices  
Vedas  
Shetout Neter

# SO WHAT SPARKS ACTION? THE ANSWER IS YOU NEVER KNOW

Liz Abraham and Rachel Rasmussen

Sometimes it feels like no one understands but you, no one else cares. What inspires hope, then?

This spring three carloads of donated books showed up at our door. They had come from a church congregation 138 miles away. The organizer of the St. James Episcopal book drive was a mom. She learned about B2P from her incarcerated son who had received books from us. She was touched that someone else cared. She told her congregation. So, on that sunny May morning, caring people drove from West Dundee to deliver the books a mom's congregation collected so that many other peoples' sons (and daughters) had books.

So, sometimes people know and care. Other times, you tell; you ask; you hope. At a COVID-safe version

of our annual Martin Luther King Day of Service we held a curbside drop-off for book donations relating to MLK's legacy. For those who couldn't drop off books, we had an MLK Day Amazon Wish list. This drive was a huge success both in itself but also in the way it spawned more drives: The Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting, First Mennonite Church, the Mutual Aid Working Group of the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO) of UIUC, and the Champaign Rotary and Sunshine Rotary clubs, all organized book drives for B2P. Meanwhile members of our local Central Illinois Mosque & Islamic Center keep us stocked with Qurans year round.

Sometimes you don't tell or ask, but people act anyway. The local Unitarian Universalist (UU) church helped us to publicize a UU prisoner pen-pal

program, *Worthy Now*\*. They helped hand out leaflets to book donors at the MLK Day drive by. This service work alerted the youth program to B2P's mission and need. That group not only passed along information about *Worthy Now*, but organized a larger book drive among the UU churches across the central region of Illinois, to see that incarcerated people received books

It seems that caring, that doing good is contagious. And it feels good. Very good. With so many books to choose from, we are better equipped to provide incarcerated people with the kinds of books they request to support them in their own goals and needs. You never know what sparks action; but we are very grateful when it happens.



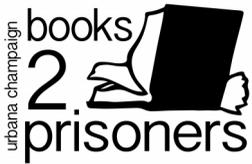
(L to R) from the congregation of St. James Episcopal, West Dundee, IL.: Mike Hippler, Sue Bennett, Mike Pierce, Pastoral Associate at St. James and Christine Dalphy; representatives of the Urbana Unitarian Universalist Youth Group with a carload from their Central Illinois regional book drive; just some of the frequently requested "how to start a business," and "learning a trade," books, plus much needed GED study books from the Champaign Rotary Club drive; UIUC undergrad and weekly volunteer, Josephine Duffy, helps to unload the cars.

\* <https://worthynow.org>

I was recently introduced to your generosity of book-giving which fills my soul with gratitude knowing there are people who are concerned and are willing to assist us in our development and education. Thank You!  
I'm requesting the GED prep book, A writing book on How to write a Biography. And I'm also looking for a Blacklaw Dictionary book to interpret legal terms.

MAY GOD REWARD YOU ALL FOR YOU ALL DOING FOR PRISONERS THAT'S LOCKED UP. ITS PEOPLE LIKE YOU WHY I CHANGE MY LIFE AROUND I'M NOT THE PERSON I WAS WHEN I CAME IN AT THE AGE OF 18 YEARS OLD WELL 17 YEARS OLD 11 YEARS AGO YOU ALL HAVE BEEN HERE FOR ME TIME AFTER TIME AND I WANT TO SAY I LOVE YOU ALL AND THANK YOU ALL FROM MY HEART.

I Love Getting Books From You I don't Have No Family OR Friends on The Out Side You are The only ones That I write To God Bless You All For Your Program without It I would not have anything at all.



U-C Books to Prisoners  
A working group of the Independent Media Center  
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<http://books2prisoners.org/>

*(Books: inspiration and Fuel for change - continued from page 1)*

to be. With many of life's distractions gone, prison can provide opportunity to grow. Prison teaches you to persevere, but you may persevere going in the wrong direction. A book can provide the chance of finding the right direction. That is what happened to me. The Bible was the book for me.

Today prisons provide educational programming for only a small per-

centage of those incarcerated. You can spend a year in prison without ever moving up the waiting list to attend GED classes. That is so wrong. And dangerous for our community. People leave prison no better educated than when they entered. Like fruit left on the vine, wasting away. Many incarcerated spend their time in their cells, with no plan for the future. No catalyst for change. I volunteer at Books to Prisoners because sending books to in-

carcerated people may provide an opportunity for self-improvement; for reading the book that finally makes things click. The Bible tells me that those in prison are my neighbors and I must care for my neighbors. I see prisoners in our country as in need, and at 72 years of age, I am weary. Then, I remind myself, as I remind you: you can never grow weary of doing good.

*(A Record Breaking Response! - continued from page 1)*

By itself this campaign made up for the funding loss from having to cancel three benefit book sales. The amazement grows when we consider it happened in 2020 of all years. We hardly know how to acknowledge this outpouring on behalf of those who have suffered the most neglect during COVID. These funds put us in the position to redouble our efforts to get hold of the best books we can,

In the first six months of 2021

**3300+**  
books shipped



**1000+**  
readers served

to provide to as many prisoners as we can, as quickly as we can. Thank you for encouraging so many people who survived COVID in our prisons, by making sure the books flow, and with the books, the message that they are not forgotten. As one prisoner wrote us, "we are extremely thankful for people like you. It means a lot to be cared for at all, let alone by strangers. Thank you."