In a country with one of the most advanced legal systems in the world, mine is just one of thousands of stories showcasing the flaws of our judicial process. When it seemed no other options remained, my team of innocence advocates grabbed a hammer, chisel, and pick-axe and removed a mountain to expose the truth. Just as doctors provide hope and save lives, they too, are bringing me back to life.

I NEVER IMAGINED IT COULD HAPPEN TO ME.

Floyd Bledsoe

Exonerated of murder in Kansas on December 8, 2015

Read Floyd’s story on page 6
With the exoneration of Floyd Bledsoe and the popularity of the Netflix series Making a Murderer at the end of 2015, the Midwest and the world were introduced to the injustices of our legal system and the work of innocence organizations. As a result, MIP has received extra exposure in 2016 as we work to exonerate Rodney Lincoln, Michael Politte, Charles Erickson, and more. But what we do is not at all glamorous and none of us wish for celebrity status.

People often ask why we do what we do. The answer is always our clients—fathers, sons, mothers, and daughters—locked behind bars for crimes they did not commit.

We learn so much about trust, hope, and courage from the wrongfully convicted. They are our families. And we are their voice, telling the untold stories that have been ignored for far too long, bringing truth and fairness to light.

Fundamentally, we all have a moral obligation to care. As citizens, we are part of the system and its broken policies. And when justice isn’t served, each one of us bears the responsibility of righting these wrongs. By supporting MIP’s mission, you are helping provide pro bono legal and investigative services to those with a substantial claim of innocence, as well as advocating for system reform to limit the number of wrongful convictions in the future. Through your support, we can right these wrongs. You can make a difference.

Tricia Bushnell, Director

Why We Exist:
FOR OUR CLIENTS AND BECAUSE OF YOU

Research estimates between 2% and 5% of all prisoners in the U.S. are innocent.

That equates to as many as 7,000 wrongly convicted people in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Arkansas.

Their average time already served is 14 years.

MIP currently has 600 prisoners on our wait list; we are investigating 40 cases; 12 cases are in litigation.

It takes 7-10 years from initial review to exoneration.

Case preparation costs $100,000 or more.

A full exoneration can exceed $325,000.

MIP’s annual budget is $550,000.
We Can’t Do It Alone:
MORE STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES NEEDED

MIP’S MOST FAQS:

How does MIP decide which cases to pursue?

We collect transcripts, police reports, forensic reports, and appellate documents. Then volunteer attorneys screen the application by answering this question: In a hypothetical world, if we had unlimited resources, what steps could we take to attack the State’s evidence and reinforce what the applicant says really happened? If the answer is nothing, the application is closed; but often the answer is a list of steps that turns into an investigation plan. We’re not looking for what’s likely—we’re looking for what’s possible. Staff reviews the screens and makes a decision whether the case goes on the investigation waitlist. If the investigation pans out, we litigate.

Why does exoneration take so long?
The process is long because the burden of proving innocence is high. The amount of time varies based on the nature and age of the case and the amount of difficulty in peeling back the layers of evidence to determine the truth. Investigation is inherently inefficient if you’re doing it right. We meticulously review police and lab reports, locate legal files, and find and interview witnesses. Unfortunately, our legal system values fairness over efficiency, so even after we get a client back into the court system, the process is complicated, lengthy, and never quite linear.
Exoneree Floyd S. Bledsoe: HOW FAITH AND FRIENDS SAVED HIS LIFE

Floyd knew he had nothing to do with what happened to his 14-year-old sister-in-law in November 1999. But it would take time, money, and dedication from his advocates at KU Law’s Project for Innocence and MIP to move mountains and expose the truth.

Floyd’s was a textbook tale of injustice: a wrongful conviction laden with inadequate investigation, ineffective trial counsel, prosecutorial misconduct, and most unfathomable... the false testimony of a family member.

Floyd’s brother, Tom Bledsoe, led police to the body of Camille Arfman near Oskaloosa, Kansas. Tom’s attorney handed over the gun used to shoot Arfman and Tom confessed, to authorities and his pastor. Yet a week later, Tom recanted his confession, pinning the crime on his older brother. Floyd had a verifiable alibi and no physical evidence connected him to the scene. Nevertheless, based on Tom’s testimony, Floyd was convicted of Arfman’s murder and sentenced to life in prison in 2000.

KU Law’s Project for Innocence began representing Floyd after the Kansas Supreme Court upheld his conviction in 2007. In 2008, a federal appeal gave Floyd back his freedom, but the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated his conviction and Floyd returned to prison.

In 2012, KU obtained an order for DNA testing and with funding from MIP, testing occurred in 2015. Results showed Tom’s DNA matched swabs from a rape kit taken from Arfman, and DNA on her socks matched Tom and Floyd’s father, Floyd L. Bledsoe.

Shortly after KU and MIP asked for Floyd’s release, Tom committed suicide in November 2015. He left a note exonerating Floyd, implicating Jefferson County officials in misconduct, and included a map of the crime scene.

Deemed innocent, Floyd left the courthouse on December 8, 2015 without an apology and with little to show for nearly 6,000 days behind bars.

“My faith and desire to see my kids again got me through times of despair,” tells Floyd. To pass the days, he learned to paint landscapes and wildlife. He shared peace with dying inmates as a hospice volunteer.

“I developed personal connections with the students and innocence advocates who worked my case and they offered me hope. The tipping point came when KU Law partnered with MIP in 2014.”

Declared innocent, Floyd left the courthouse on December 8, 2015 without an apology and with little to show for nearly 6,000 days behind bars.

“My friends at KU and MIP didn’t leave me after my exoneration, but are helping me adjust to a new world.

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“My friends at KU and MIP didn’t leave me after my exoneration, but are helping me adjust to a new world. I moved past just being a case and words on paper to them. They care what happens to me.”

Floyd is on a mission to ensure legal injustices don’t happen to others. He is a regular at MIP events and attended the Innocence Network Conference earlier this year. He also speaks out in support of legislation to prevent wrongful convictions.

Floyd is adjusting well to his new life outside Hutchinson, Kansas. He’s found new love with an old flame, and is in contact with his sons.

With your help, MIP can bring more happy endings to stories like Floyd’s.
It took two trials, flawed forensic evidence, and a coached identification to convict Rodney Lincoln of the murder of JoAnn Tate and the assault on her two young daughters. Now, 34 years later, the truth has come to light.

At trial, the State relied on two pieces of evidence:

- A forensic analyst testified that a hair found at the scene "matched Mr. Lincoln." In 2010, DNA testing determined the hair was not Rodney’s.

- Despite initial insistence of 7-year-old victim M.D. that their assailant was "Bill," investigators coached an eyewitness identification from the young witness. While in the hospital, they told her "the bad man" was behind a door and if she did not identify "the bad man," he would go free. Investigators showed M.D. just two photos - one of Rodney and one of a relative. M.D. identified Rodney as the perpetrator. She now understands that identification was wrong and she and her family continue to publicly call for his release.

“For the first time in my life, everything is lined up: my gut, my brain, all of it. Rodney Lincoln was never there. He didn’t do this,” proclaimed M.D. in her affidavit.


Will you support us in our fight to free Rodney Lincoln?

When Charles Erickson was arrested for the 2001 death of Columbia Daily Tribune sports editor Kent Heitholt, he had a job and was attending college. Nothing in his past suggested he was capable of murder. No evidence linked him or his co-defendant, Ryan Ferguson, to the crime.

 Nonetheless, Erickson and Ferguson went to prison in 2005 after police manufactured a false confession from Charles, one he has since recanted. Video shows detectives coerced Charles with misleading information and spoon-fed him details of the crime during interrogation.

Although Ryan Ferguson was exonerated on November 12, 2013, Charles still sits behind bars in a Missouri correctional facility.

Currently, Charles is 32 years old with a smile that’s contagious. He is innocent. He has family that loves him and a full life ahead of him. With your support, MIP can advocate for Charles’ release and work for reforms making false confessions less likely in the future.

#FreeRodneyLincoln:
ONCE THE STATE’S STAR WITNESS, VICTIM NOW PLEAS FOR OUR CLIENT’S RELEASE

#FreeCharlesErickson:
RIGHTING A WRONG WILL GIVE YOUNG MAN A SECOND CHANCE

HOPE

Around here, it is a big four letter word
They say, "Hope to be free? Hope to be a bird"

HOPE

It is a pesky word, just an annoyance
You think of the future? That’s for clairvoyants

HOPE

We pull it up by its roots or smash it down
It often seems destroyed but is always found

HOPE

Poem by Charles Erickson
Will you help us secure justice for another innocent client in 2017?

LaQuanda (Faye) Jacobs:
“When I thought all hope was gone, the Midwest Innocence Project bridged the gap between hope vs. hopelessness, justice vs. injustice, believing vs. unbelieving. Through your support, I have my dreams back.”

Michael Politte:
“Guilty until proven innocent is the reality of the fight for innocence. David vs. Goliath—it’s a fight between individuals that posses nothing against a government with unlimited resources and power. With each donation, you help restore the balance of power onto the scales of justice. Save lives. Change laws. Please join us.”

Lamar Johnson:
“I don’t know where I’d be now if it wasn’t for MIP. When they came into my life, they gave me hope when it seemed there wasn’t any. They gave me a family when I’d have been grateful for just a friend. As one of thousands of people wrongfully imprisoned, I pray for your continued support. You not only help right the wrongs committed against innocent people, but also against society as well.”

Freedom Isn’t Free: Your donations expedite more exonerations

Donations to the Midwest Innocence Project (no matter the size) go directly to our important work of freeing the innocent in our five-state region. Contribute now and you will help correct an injustice.

- $50 Helps MIP collect critical legal documents of an incarcerated inmate
- $100 Covers travel costs to see a client in prison
- $250 Sends an investigator to interview one witness
- $500 Funds initial expert review in preparation for litigation
- $1000 Provides for critical testing of one item for DNA

You can be the one to help exonerate the next wrongfully-convicted prisoner with your tax-deductible contribution.

Thank you in advance for your support and thanks to those who contribute ongoing time, talent, and treasure on behalf of our clients.

MIP would like to recognize Kansas City-based Edgar Law Firm LLC for our largest single donation in 2016. Through a “cy pres doctrine” award left from unclaimed cash in a lawsuit settlement, we benefited from a gift of $658,980 to our general operating fund.
TOGETHER, WE ARE GREATER THAN THE SUM OF OUR PARTS.

Together We Can Make A Difference: OUR PARTNERSHIPS AT A GLANCE

In our five-state region, MIP works in unison with our dedicated and renowned partners to provide the best legal representation for innocent incarcerated people throughout the Midwest. Together, we are greater than the sum of our parts. In addition to these state organizations, we have strong partnerships with many of the top legal firms in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Arkansas.

UMKC and University of Missouri Schools of Law

The Midwest Innocence Project was founded at the University of Missouri–Kansas City School of Law in 2000. Today we operate an independent organization with strong ties to our roots in the UMKC School of Law and the University of Missouri School of Law Wrongful Conviction Clinics. In cooperation with MIP, students aid in reviewing case transcripts, developing investigation strategies, gathering documents and evidence, interviewing witnesses, and consulting experts.

University of Kansas School of Law

In 2014, MIP entered a partnership agreement with the Paul E. Wilson Project for Innocence & Post-Conviction Remedies at KU’s School of Law to assist with the more than 200 letters received each year from Kansas inmates. Since 2009, students in the Project have won at least 28 conviction reversals. Their most recent win, the exoneration of Floyd Bledsoe, included the work of 10 law students who assisted professors on the case over an eight-year period.

Iowa State Public Defender’s Wrongful Conviction Division & Innocence Project of Iowa

Since forming a partnership in 2015, The Wrongful Conviction Division in the Iowa Office of the State Public Defender, Innocence Project of Iowa, and MIP have systemized the review of innocence cases in Iowa. The partnership has been nationally recognized for their leadership in working to strengthen forensic science. The use of flawed forensic testimony to secure convictions is a major focus.

Nebraska Innocence Project

Together, MIP and NEIP work to free the wrongly convicted in Nebraska. MIP and NEIP recently worked to pass legislation and model policies requiring use of the four-core evidence-based practices for eyewitness identification reform.

Read more about these partners and Hair Microscopy Review on page 14
Strengthen Forensic Accuracy:
MIP AT FOREFRONT OF HAIR MICROSCOPY REVIEW PROJECT AND CRIME LAB OVERSIGHT

MIP works to strengthen science and forensic investigation in the Midwest by leading the charge to develop and implement systemic reviews in the forensic fields. MIP has undertaken a statewide review of microscopic hair comparisons with our partners in Iowa. In 2016, we expanded our work in Iowa to include a review of arson and bite-mark cases.

In 2012, the FBI began an internal review of all cases in which their lab performed microscopic hair analysis, after scientific evidence showed flaws in the testing process. After reviewing hundreds of hair comparison cases, the FBI reported that improper analysis and testimony were presented in at least 90% of reviewed cases. A large number of hair microscopy analysts across the country receive training through the FBI Lab. As a result, potentially hundreds of innocent people in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Arkansas remain incarcerated based on this type of evidence.

Currently, MIP and its partners at the Innocence Project of Iowa and the newly created Wrongful Conviction Division in the Iowa Office of the State Public Defender are systematically reviewing over 100 hair cases in Iowa with the help of the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation’s Criminalistics Lab. This model process has gained national attention and will serve as a foundation as MIP partners with other stakeholders in our five-state area.

In addition, MIP is the only organization looking into cognitive bias as it relates to hair microscopy.
Exoneree Compensation

With no money, housing, transportation, health services, or insurance, and a criminal record not always cleared despite innocence, punishment lingers long after exoneration. About one-third of exonerees have yet to be compensated for the injustices suffered and time spent incarcerated.

Regionally, there are no laws regarding compensation in Arkansas or Kansas. If exonerated by DNA, Missouri will provide for $50 per day of confinement. Recent efforts to change or increase compensation in Kansas and Missouri did not pass.

Nebraska law provides for compensation of up to $500,000. Iowa allows for $50 per day of wrongful incarceration plus lost wages up to $25,000 a year.

Help us help them regain their lives.

Advocate for Policy Reform:
FIXING THE BROKEN SYSTEM IS OUR MORAL OBLIGATION

As DNA exonerations across America increase, wrongful convictions have revealed disturbing fissures and trends in our criminal justice system. And for every case that involves DNA, there are hundreds that do not. Advocating for changes in policy can help to rectify these trends.

Eyewitness Misidentification

Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing.

Iowa does not have legal policies regarding eyewitness identification and Missouri has repeatedly failed to pass any reform measures, despite yearly introductions of new bills.

The exciting news is that Arkansas released a model policy on the issue in 2012, and in 2016 both Kansas and Nebraska passed important legislation, requiring law enforcement agencies to adopt written policies to include the four-core evidence-based practices.

Thank you Kansas and Nebraska Law Enforcement Officials for doing the right thing!

The Midwest Innocence Project also advocates for reform in these areas:
• False Confessions
• Ineffective Counsel
• State Misconduct
• Incentivized Informants
Debuting in November 2015, *Making A Murderer* became an overnight phenomenon, getting the world talking about our broken justice system. The 10-part documentary follows the disturbing case of Steven Avery, a Wisconsin man who has spent nearly 30 of his 54 years behind bars. Steven was wrongfully convicted for rape at the age of 22. DNA testing exonerated him in 2003 after 18 years in prison. After filing a law suit for damages related to his wrongful conviction, Mr. Avery was charged with a subsequent murder. In shocking detail, *Making A Murderer* focuses on Steven’s 2006 trial. Since its premiere, people around the world have called for Steven’s release after seeing evidence of misconduct by investigating officials. MIP’s Director, Tricia Bushnell, currently serves as associate counsel for Mr. Avery.

For more information on this riveting case and how you can help #FreeStevenAvery, visit TheMIP.org.

Michael Politte case raises red flags in MTV’s *Unlocking The Truth*

Midwest Innocence Project client Michael Politte is one of three cases featured on MTV’s *Unlocking The Truth*.

Hosted by Missouri exoneree Ryan Ferguson and Eva Nagao, director of the Exoneration Project in Chicago, the docu-series took a detailed look into the investigations of the Politte case (Missouri), as well as Byron Case (another Missourian) and Kalvin Michael Smith (North Carolina).

Like Ferguson, Politte, Case, and Smith had their lives taken away from them at a very young age. Their cases are flagged with imperfect investigations and circumstantial evidence. All three continue to maintain their innocence.

Michael Politte was just 14 when he was accused of murdering his mother and setting her on fire. Michael was falsely convicted of the crime largely based on unreliable fire-identification methods. There is no physical evidence connecting him to the crime scene, and MIP has uncovered new evidence regarding the fire science used to convict him. This evidence not only supports Michael’s innocence, but further indicates that Rita’s killer is still free. Although other alternative suspects came to light during the initial investigation of the case, none were fully investigated by police.

“If it can happen to a 14-year-old kid, who else can it happen to?” Politte asked viewers.

Learn more about how MIP is working to #FreeMichaelPolitte and new developments in arson science on our website, TheMIP.org.
Join Our Cause:

**GIVE HOPE**

You can help us free an innocent person by joining our #12for12 campaign. MIP averages 12 clients in litigation at any moment. Give $12 per month for 12 months and help us bring someone’s loved one home.

In addition to the #12for12 Campaign, please consider these many other ways to give hope:

- **Make a Traditional Donation**
- **Leave a Legacy through Planned Giving**
- **Pledge Monthly Contributions**
- **Sponsor or Attend an Event**
  - Faces of Innocence: May 4, 2017
- **Volunteer in our Office or at an Event**
- **Demand Legislative Reform**
- **Share our Mission**

**THROUGH YOUR SUPPORT, WE CAN RIGHT THESE WrONGS. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND HELP BRING TRUTH TO LIGHT.**
“It’s a fight between individuals that posses nothing against a government with unlimited resources and power. With each donation, you help restore the balance of power onto the scales of justice.”

— Michael Politte

Follow us on social media, or visit our website for the latest updates on our client’s cases.

www.TheMIP.org