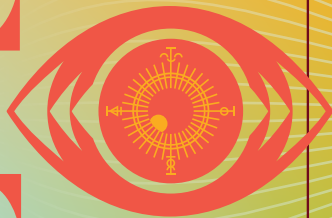


MIDWEST INNOCENCE PROJECT

WE SEE

BIG THINGS IN OUR

FUTURE



Midwest
Innocence
Project

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

MANIFEST

A NEW REALITY

Seismic shifts are rarely the result of overnight action. Instead, it's tiny movements—applied consistently over the course of months or years—that cause major, landscape-altering change.

This year at MIP, we've seen our consistent pressure, all the potential energy we've built up, turn kinetic. All your donations, your hours, and your voices have shifted into concrete progress and momentum. Nowhere was that more clear than at the tail end of 2021, when Missouri passed statute 547.031, creating a legal avenue for prosecutors to file a motion to vacate a wrongful conviction. Because of that mechanism, Kevin Strickland walked free after 43 years. We hope that on the other side of the state, the same law will soon exonerate current clients Michael Politte and Lamar Johnson, giving Lamar his long-awaited freedom too.

Getting a law like this on the books is one of those seismic shifts. It's a testament to the power a community—an entire state—holds when they stand up and say, "Innocence is enough." And as we sustained that same energy throughout 2022, we can feel a new future taking shape. But amidst those victories, how do we reach behind us to make sure the pace of progress continues?

Change—especially in something as wide-reaching and ingrained as the criminal legal system—is never just about one person, or one organization. It's about building collective power. Teaching and empowering the community. Developing a network of leaders who can keep the arc of history bending towards justice in the next generation.

This year has been a testament to that philosophy. Thanks to your generosity and continued support, MIP is leading the way within the 71-member Innocence Network. We've been leaders in implementing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion trainings within the Network, because innocence work often comes at the intersection of race, class, disability, and more. If we're not listening to all those perspectives, and integrating them into our work, we're doing it wrong.

Meanwhile, investigator Blair Johnson has taught workshops both internally and nationally to promote thorough investigative techniques in innocence cases. In prosecutors' offices region-wide, former client Ricky Kidd, who was wrongly imprisoned for 23 years, has been leading "The Cost of a Prosecutor's Decision" trainings. And our extensive research work into microscopic hair comparison, cognitive bias in forensic science, and more, led by Summer Farrar, is paving the way for long-term change at the root of the wrongful conviction problem.

This is the thread connecting everything we do: It's not just about doing the work to free the innocent *now*. **It's about crafting a future in which wrongful conviction work isn't necessary at all.**

As an organization, we're no longer at a point where we're simply trying to keep our heads above water, treating the symptoms of an unjust system. Instead, we're proactive: identifying the root causes of that unjust system, developing solutions, and pouring energy into manifesting a better future. It's a methodical approach — one that requires unrelenting dedication, unity, resilience, and leadership. And it's an approach that requires resources.

With your support, we'll keep manifesting a better future. Together, we'll keep closing the gap between what is—and what can be.

Tricia J. Rojo Bushnell

of
Midwest
Innocence
Project

Tricia J. Rojo Bushnell
Executive Director,
Midwest Innocence Project

MANIFEST

A NEW REALITY

As you can dream, so too can you create.
What do you wish to bring forth into this reality?

Gaze into your inner world and manifest outward the vision of your ideal world.

It takes effort to create a new reality, but given time the incremental shifts
become a massive wave of change.



Explore this deck, learn about our stories, and allow
the themes to offer inspiration to create change.

DAILY DRAW

Quiet your thoughts. Lightly shuffle the deck 3 times, bringing a question to focus in your mind. Pull one card at random to help bring insight to your day.

PAST-PRESENT-FUTURE

Is there a concern that is blocking your path forward? A three-card, past-present-future draw can help you understand a past context, present feelings, and future outlook to your ruminations. Lightly shuffle the deck 3 times, gently bringing that concern to focus in your mind. Cut the deck into 3 smaller stacks; turn over the top card on each. The left-hand card reflects your past, middle the present, and right-hand future. Use these cards as a lens to clarify your own thoughts and feelings about the situation and to reflect these thoughts back to you.

**In this deck cards do not have a reverse interpretation.*



Balance is difficult to achieve within chaos.

Within shades of uncertainty it can be difficult to determine right from wrong. The impact of your decisions reverberates — can you accept the consequences of your actions? They say justice is blind, but your eyes are open. Explore your truth and find a place where you feel aligned with integrity.

JUSTICE

If you meet Robert Fields, a few things will likely happen. One, he'll give you a nickname. He'll crack a joke. And he'll tell you everything about your zodiac sign. But much of the world won't get to experience his jovial personality until a grave injustice is corrected. Robert is currently incarcerated in Arkansas for a crime he didn't commit, because of an existential, all-systems failure of the criminal legal process.

"He's such a kind, compelling person," said Nacente Seabury of Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila, and part of his MIP legal team. "He's someone who I have no doubt would do so much good for this world."

In El Dorado, Arkansas in 2015, someone shot at two women, hitting one in the leg. Neither victim died. The perpetrators, the victims said, had been three Black teenagers—even giving police the name and address of the shooter. Police never followed that lead.

Two years later, after Robert was arrested for a petty crime, the shooting victim saw his mugshot on the local jail website and claimed it was him who shot her. At trial, represented by ineffective counsel, Robert was convicted solely off the victim's eyewitness testimony—which she has since recanted. He was sentenced to 54 years.

Robert retained new post-conviction counsel, who asked the victim to testify that she'd gotten her identification wrong. But lawyers failed to subpoena her, and she didn't show up. On a later petition for relief, Robert was denied on a technicality: with the signature block, the brief his attorneys filed was just over the 10-page limit.

To that point, Robert has been failed at every stage in the criminal legal process. As Robert ran out of options, MIP took over. We spent months working the case from

square one. MIP investigator Blair Johnson took several trips to Arkansas, spending time on the ground and talking to dozens of witnesses to find out what actually happened.

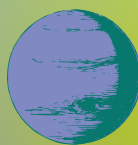
What went wrong for Robert was a kaleidoscope of issues: ineffective counsel at every stage, systemic racism in a rural town, an extensive informant network used by local officials, and a state's commitment to rule and procedure over justice. In March 2022, we filed a second amended petition for relief. Robert is still waiting months later for the federal district judge to decide whether he deserves an evidentiary hearing. Meanwhile...

"Robert is 31 years old and sitting in an Arkansas max security prison," Nacente said, "for a shooting he didn't commit and where nobody died."

This is not justice. We'll continue to fight for Robert's innocence to be recognized. Because that innocence should matter more than procedure and finality.

The systemic flaws that put Robert in prison—faulty eyewitness identification, official misconduct, ineffective counsel, post-conviction procedural gaps—will continue to put innocent people in prison if we don't keep pushing a better vision of justice.

"Other innocence projects won't necessarily take cases where there's no DNA to exonerate," Nacente said. "But MIP spent time and resources to investigate a case relying on testimony and circumstantial evidence. That type of work needs support. That's how we serve Robert and all the other Roberts we don't know about."



JOURNEY

Footsteps along a path leave traces behind.

With a goal in sight it can be easy to miss the experience that surrounds you in *this* moment. Look backwards at how far you've come; look forwards to where you are going. It's okay to wander, explore, or even chart a new course. Turn towards things that stretch you to break through limiting self-perceptions and find new growth.

Stop and feel this moment before it's gone.

JOURNEY

An MIP client's journey begins long before we come into the picture. With no options left, we are often their last hope for freedom. Here's an overview of what happens in our process.

Stage 1: Intake - APPLICATION AND SCREENING

Potential clients complete MIP's Application for Assistance to see if they meet criteria for our services. Qualified applicants are placed on a waitlist for screening. Once we have gathered relevant documents, the case is screened by staff or volunteers who summarize important information about the case. They also evaluate if investigative avenues exist that could support the defendant's claim of innocence and overcome the state's evidence used to convict the defendant at trial. Once a screen is complete, the MIP legal team analyzes the case. If wrongful conviction hallmarks are present and possible paths of investigation exist, it moves to the Investigation Waitlist.

Stage 2: Investigation

Once we have the resources to move a case off the Investigation Waitlist, investigation can take several months to years. It involves both document-based work and in-person work. MIP's investigative team also consults experts at this stage, in addition to exploring the possibility of DNA testing.

Stage 3: Litigation

After building a strong case for innocence during Investigation, MIP determines the appropriate procedure to begin litigation — state post-conviction, state or federal habeas, motions for DNA analysis — as well as the legal claims that will be raised (including constitutional violations like ineffective assistance of counsel or state misconduct).

Stage 4: Resolution

Several forms of resolution can result in freedom for our clients. Justice is a moving target: clients might be exonerated, released after serving a certain amount of their sentence, or granted clemency or parole. After clients are released, MIP offers social services to help them transition back to life outside of prison.

**This process can take years to complete.
With your support through donations, we can expand
our resources and more efficiently and effectively
serve more innocent people.**



HOPE

**If you know where the North Star is,
you can always find your way home.**

Hope is a guiding light, channelling your dreams through darkness to manifest a new reality. At times it may be hard to see the light, but sight isn't always necessary to find your way. Always hope for more than you can imagine.

HOPE

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner has called Lamar Johnson's wrongful conviction a "miscarriage of justice" — and there is no other way to put it. But thanks to her office standing up to point out past mistakes and call for Lamar's freedom, there is now a glimmer of hope surrounding his case. At the end of August, Gardner filed a motion seeking an evidentiary hearing for Lamar, where she will ask a judge to exonerate him.

This motion is a result of a new Missouri law, passed in 2021, creating a mechanism for prosecutors to ask for an exoneration after they've determined someone they sent to prison is actually innocent. That law is a product of the collective power we can build when we maintain hope, use our voices, and unrelentingly push for change.

Still, Lamar has waited over a year since that law was passed for a conclusion to his near-three-decade nightmare. He has now entered his 28th year of incarceration for a 1994 murder he did not commit. At the time of the crime, Lamar had an alibi, and was at least 10 minutes away by car from the scene.

The only evidence presented against him was an eyewitness identification made even though the witness could not see the faces of the perpetrators who wore ski masks in the night. But in the St. Louis Conviction Integrity Unit's analysis of Lamar's case, they found prosecutors had paid that witness \$4,000 to identify Lamar. At trial, prosecutors did not disclose that payment, nor did they

disclose another witness's extensive history as a jailhouse informant. And the two true perpetrators of the 1994 murder have signed affidavits swearing it was them, not Lamar, who committed the crime.

Despite the rampant misconduct, despite a Conviction Integrity Unit shining light on those truths, despite the rallies we've held in St. Louis in support of Lamar, and despite legislation being passed in Missouri to create a legal avenue for his freedom, still, he waits.

There is a second potential route to Lamar's freedom besides Kim Gardner's motion—an evidentiary hearing currently scheduled for December. This hearing has been delayed three separate times by the Missouri Attorney General. The AG's office has consistently opposed Lamar's exoneration—and has opposed every innocence case to come through their office in the past two decades.

Amidst all those delays, Lamar still waits, day after day, for weeks, months, years, decades.

Despite all this, Lamar maintains hope. He's seen the support for his exoneration grow and grow: national news outlets like CNN, NBC News, and The Washington Post have all covered his story. And we've seen the kind of change we can initiate when we all band together, hold truth to power, fight for legislation that can help the innocent, and say collectively, enough is enough.

“Lamar has unwavering faith that this is going to work out. He holds tight to that hope because it's all he has. He needs to be home.”

– Lindsay Runnels, Defense and Civil Rights Attorney with Morgan Pilate and member of Lamar's legal team

DEDICATION



If you looked into infinity, where would you dedicate your time?

Although we may be bound by the rules of time and space, we can tap into the universal flow of energy and find direction for our efforts.

What gives your soul infinite purpose and expansiveness?

DEDICATION

Progress stems from unity. But maintaining positive momentum requires patient, unrelenting dedication.

So many of MIP's long-time donors have displayed that commitment and loyalty—like Laura Welch, who's supported the organization since its inception in 2000.

More than two decades ago, she and her husband, who was then president of the board at UMKC School of Law, were looking for something to dedicate their philanthropy to. The law school's dean suggested they meet with a group there who was launching a program to look into wrongful convictions. That was, of course, the beginning stages of MIP, which officially incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in 2000.

In those early months of MIP getting off the ground, Laura started learning about systemic issues in the criminal legal system. She met people who had been wrongfully convicted, like Ellen Reasonover in St. Louis, and Dennis Fritz and Ron Williamson of “The Innocent Man” fame. Listening to those stories was a point of no return.

“This is something that as a citizen I cannot turn away from,” Laura said. “Seeing someone who is innocent sitting in prison, or on death row, or with a life sentence, for crimes they did not commit... once

I knew, I couldn't unknow. I felt called to do something about it.”

Laura spent 11 years on MIP's board, including as Vice President of Development, where she helped create the annual Faces of Innocence event that still runs today. Educating the public was of particular interest to her. For years, she hadn't realized wrongful conviction was happening—but once she did, it sparked a years-long dedication to the cause. She knew that once others grasped what was going on, they too would commit to helping.

After more than a decade, she decided to step aside from the board to clear space for new voices. But her dedication to the organization remained the same. She's been a regular donor ever since—“and I will always fund it,” she said.

Like so many other donors, volunteers, staff, and advocates, Laura recognized that innocence work is never just about wrongful incarceration. It intersects with other issues like systemic racism, mental health, poverty, and more.

At the end of the day, innocence work is about demanding a higher vision of justice that will benefit everyone. And that vision will always be worth dedicating time, money, and energy toward.

“It's a much bigger statement than just helping people who are wrongfully convicted. It's the bigger picture of what it means to be a democracy. If we are not bringing 'justice for all' then we're not living up to the definition of what a democracy even means.”

—Laura Welch



UNITY

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

When we act alone our impact is limited, but through unity we become exponentially more influential. What resources do you need to achieve your purpose?

Harness the potential of fusion to merge and release more energy into the field.

UNITY

When we work in silos, progress is slow, incomplete, or nonexistent. But working in unity creates lasting, impactful change. Thank you to our partners, and staff for being part of that collective power this year.

STAFF



Tricia Rojo Bushnell
Executive Director



Marissa Todd
Deputy Director



Rachel Wester
Managing Attorney



Summer Farrar
Project Manager



Leigh Ann Carroll
Paralegal



Chelsea Mitchell
*Supervising Attorney
MU Innocence Clinic*



Blair Johnson
Investigator



Danielle Killingsworth
Investigator



Diane Jiminez
Intake Analyst



Nicole Forys
Intake Paralegal



Courtney Ellis
Social Worker



Tish Sjuts
Development Associate



Ricky Kidd
*Community
Engagement Manager*



Brittney Loftin
Office Manager



Anthony Dixon Sr.
Office Assistant

Alexandra Aparicio*
*Reid Foundation
Staff Attorney*

Kevin Jenco*
*Bryan Cave Leighton
Paisner LLP Fellow*

Rubith Cordova*
*Staff Attorney
Arkansas Review*

Zach Buchanan*
*Supervising Attorney
UMKC Clinic*

**Not pictured*

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LEAD



**Though the path may be uncertain,
leap with courage into the great unknown.**

It isn't easy—forging the path and leading the way. It takes great courage to embrace your fear and step beyond what is familiar. But visions of the future call to you, and the risk is worth the reward. Your bravery will not be overlooked—as you step forward you might just find others who will follow behind.

LEAD

The Midwest Innocence Project has long been a regional leader. But that leadership has extended nationally—and keeps growing.

To fully grasp MIP's reach, it's helpful to understand how the Innocence Network is structured. Nationally, there is the Innocence Network, led by an Executive Board. But the Network is also an affiliation of 71 regional innocence projects. These local organizations (including MIP) focus on a specific geographic area, litigate cases, and directly support clients on the ground.

But in addition to all the tactical and support work locally, MIP has taken an even bigger leadership role nationally. Our Executive Director, Tricia Rojo Bushnell, is the Network President and Executive Board member. Her presidential term will end in the coming months—but the impact she's made will carry on for years to come.

Under Tricia's leadership, the Network has offered Diversity, Equity & Inclusion trainings; worked on a more inclusive language guide; released its first statement about systemic racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder in 2020; and created a purpose statement and code of conduct for the organization's annual conference. And as a board member, she worked hard to implement term limits.

"Instituting term limits was a DEI issue," Tricia said. "Without them, we're just getting the same people in the same seats. We need to open the doors to younger and more diverse people. We need to be creating avenues for exonerees to have more of a voice. This is how we set the stage for the next generation of leadership."

Tricia also nominated former MIP client Ricky Kidd to join her on the board. Out of the 22-person Innocence Network Executive

Board, Ricky is currently one of two exonerees serving.

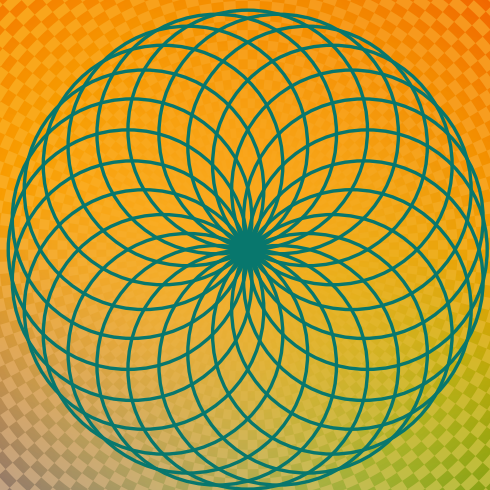
"I think when I'm at the table sitting there with all the board members, it's an automatic reminder of the work they do," Ricky said. "When it's in your face like that, it's a powerful reminder. We all need that jolt to keep us going."

Ricky's leadership isn't limited to his position on the national board, or his job as Community Engagement Manager at MIP. He's also developed a curriculum to train prosecutors on the realities of wrongful conviction. Ricky led the training, called "The Cost of a Prosecutor's Decision: Blind Spots of True Justice," for 80 prosecutors from the Jackson County (Missouri) District Attorney's Office — the same office that wrongfully convicted him in 1996. He'll lead the training in St. Louis this year, and looks to expand the program nationwide.

While he was still incarcerated, Ricky regularly spent time researching wrongful conviction cases and their common causes. Now, he has the platform to share what he's learned, and lead others to create a better vision of justice.

Ricky's education of prosecutors, Tricia's spearheading of critical initiatives at the Network level, their work on the national Executive Board to advocate for preventative policies, and the work MIP does on the ground in our 5-state region is a foundation for a more just criminal legal system. That leadership is more important now than ever.

"We're having success," Ricky said. "But the backlog is so huge that if we're ever going to get to the bottom of the pile we need to prevent wrongful convictions from happening in the future."



PROPOGATE

Radiate ever outward, grow exponentially.

Plants propogate freely when given the opportunity to flourish. If given time to develop roots, we can then spread seeds of change, sharing our hopes with the world. Like a sunflower that naturally turns toward the light, you too can shine when you follow your instincts.

PROPOGATE

The most valuable tool in an innocence case isn't always physical evidence, specific testimony, or a legal process. Often, the most powerful tool is simply the truth. Unearthing that truth can be complicated and resource-intensive. But that's exactly what our investigations department does. And that commitment to truth is a philosophy we hope to spread beyond just the walls of our own organization.

Blair Johnson, who started as an MIP volunteer in 2016, is our full-time investigator. Her role is a combination of document-based work (ensuring clean case files, hunting down records, building out timelines and casts of characters for our clients' cases) and on-the-ground interviews.

An investigation into any one case could take months or even years, filled with meticulous analysis of thousands of documents, and potentially multiple trips for in-person interviews. That time spent in the field can be invaluable, especially in cases where someone has been convicted based solely on circumstantial evidence or eyewitness testimony. For most crimes, there is someone—often multiple people—who knows the truth. It's our job to shine the light on what's there.

"We don't know what we don't know," Blair said. "When we go in and talk to people, we let them lead the way, and let the truth come to us. A lot of times the big breaks in cases will be things you didn't expect."

Spending time and energy to listen to others' stories—and giving them the space to share the whole truth—is one of the most important pieces of our investigative work. It's never as simple as picking up the phone.

"We knock on doors," Blair said. "We don't do phone interviews, or send letters ahead

of time. We just show up and knock. You get a more honest interview. It's definitely the harder way to do things. It's a lot more resources. You could be staying for multiple days, to track down one person. But you get better results."

The investigative principles by which we work—thoroughness, preparation, approaching a case with an open mind rather than a bias toward confirming or disproving one specific version of events—are ones we're passing forward, too. In addition to training our internal staff, interns, and student clinics, Blair led a 6-week training this year for other Innocence Network investigators nationwide. Her workshops include instruction on online investigations, interviewing, records collection, and how to create timelines and casts of characters for a case.

We also launched a 2-year investigative fellowship, filled by Danielle Killingsworth for 2022-23. The goal for the program is twofold: have someone on staff to help with our investigative workload, and to train the leaders of tomorrow in thorough investigative techniques and prevent wrongful convictions in the first-place.

"The idea is we take on these fellows, train them up on our methods, so they can go forth and be good defense investigators in the community," Blair said. "This is our way of training people in-house and spreading that wealth."

Not all innocence organizations have a full-time investigative staff. Until 2018, MIP didn't either. But thanks to donors' continued support, we've scaled our investigative work alongside our litigative work—and now get to propagate what we've learned throughout the rest of the country.



CHANGE

**Energy can neither be created nor destroyed,
it can only change form.**

Change is a constant surrounding us, more often as small incremental shifts than seismic revolutions. We can choose to flow and transform, or resist and be eroded over time. Release what no longer serves you, and open yourself to new possibility.

CHANGE

Lasting change does not come from simply treating symptoms. It has to happen at the root. When we're talking about the scale of change needed within an unjust criminal legal system, that philosophy remains true. The MIP research and review program has grown directly from that mindset. Our litigative work can correct individual cases, but our research work hopes to contribute to correcting larger, systemic flaws.

By teaming up with partners and experts from law, science, and other disciplines, the MIP research and review program is peeling back the layers of why wrongful convictions happen, and what solutions can emerge. Patterns and topics worth researching come from our own case work, but also from other sources like official reports and disclosures, investigative reporting, and the work of other innocence organizations.

The project that really kicked off our research program is reaching its final stages. Summer Farrar, our project manager and research coordinator, has led a years-long analysis of cases that involved microscopic hair comparison to convict. Up until the early 2000s, the FBI used to identify suspects as "matches" to hair samples collected from a crime scene — but we now know this kind of language can be misleading. This created a need to review cases from our region to better understand the use of this potentially problematic testimony.

Throughout the analysis, we found significant opportunity to improve the criminal legal

system when it comes to the use of all forensic science — not just hair comparison. How forensic science is analyzed, described at trial, and used by prosecutors and defense attorneys can be very informative for devising a path forward to more reliable and accurate use of forensic science in the criminal legal system.

"In looking at the cases we did, there is something for pretty much every stakeholder in the process to improve," Summer said. "There's the forensic analyst and the way they describe their results, both in report language and how they testify at trial. We are also seeing that prosecutors, defense attorneys, and the judges in their role as the gatekeeper can also help improve the way forensic information is relayed at trial.

But it's not just flawed forensic science that can contribute to wrongful convictions. MIP is also developing projects to better understand how other factors such as official misconduct and eyewitness misidentification play a role, and help generate new ideas for how some of these issues can be improved.

At MIP, we, of course, are still working tirelessly to correct past injustices. But through your continued support, we're also able to be more proactive, and keep one eye toward the future. Where are there opportunities for more education around forensic science? How can we promote more accountability for official misconduct? What structures can we put into place to keep wrongful conviction from happening?

**These are the questions we're working to answer today.
With your support, the answers could help shape
a more just tomorrow.**



**Like the phoenix rising from the ashes,
destruction doesn't have to be the end.**

Although transformation may make you feel vulnerable, releasing old patterns allows you to grow and expand. Give yourself space to dream and visualize new potential to create change in the world around you. Approach this moment with curiosity and take time to delight in the process of evolution and discovery.

REBIRTH

As Michael Politte went to get his first driver's license this year, at 38, there was only one problem. He was a "ghost" in the Missouri DMV's system. After all, what records could exist for someone who went into prison at 14 and didn't come out for nearly a quarter-century?

Michael spent 23 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. And rebirth—on the other side of wrongful incarceration—can be a long road.

At 14, Michael woke up to the smell of smoke and his mother dead in their home. That trauma was only compounded by Michael being arrested for her murder, and eventually sentenced to life in prison.

For more than two decades, Michael declared his innocence. Despite being convicted based on investigators saying his shoes tested positive for gasoline, testing revealed that the "accelerant" was actually just an adhesive used to make footwear. Anyone's shoes could have tested positive for the same thing.

This April, because of new Missouri sentencing guidelines for juveniles, Michael was released on parole. He's still fighting for full exoneration. But until then, Michael is rebuilding his life—starting with his first bank account and that driver's license.

"I was like a ghost in their system," Michael said. "They couldn't find me. Me and my sister had to explain that I've been incarcerated my whole life."

Thanks to a GoFundMe set up for Michael

by MIP, he could buy a vehicle. A family friend got him a carpentry job at a local construction company. The best part? He's getting paid a living wage. It's a far cry from when he built furniture while in prison — for less than \$1/hour.

"What motivates me is I was making 71 cents an hour then," he said. "I make more in one day now than I did in a month there. So I feel like I'm really doing good. For the amount of time I was in prison, I feel like I'm doing really well and way ahead of what people expected."

Every weekend, he goes to the stock car races with his cousin Brandon — a funny story, Michael says, because the last time he remembers his cousin, Brandon was 16 and driving to high school, and now he has two grandkids.

"It really puts into perspective how long I've been locked up," he said.

Until he's exonerated, Michael lives with parole restrictions, like not being able to vote, or leave the state without permission. But he's proud of how far he's come—and how much there's still left to accomplish.

He'll start school in October, where he'll learn other trades like cabinetmaking, framing, and welding. And his big goal is one he's revived from childhood: to buy a stock car, so he can drive in those races instead of just watching.



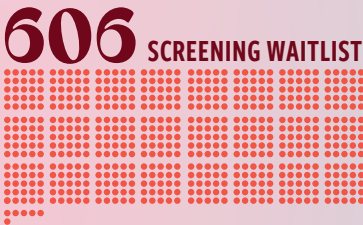
How far do the ripples travel?

Small or large, actions can have a reverberating impact and lead to infinite potential. When you stay too long in one place you forget how large the world is. By deciding to act, instead of ignoring the difficulties, your power grows more than you can perceive. Give yourself perspective, you can't know which moment will tip the scales.

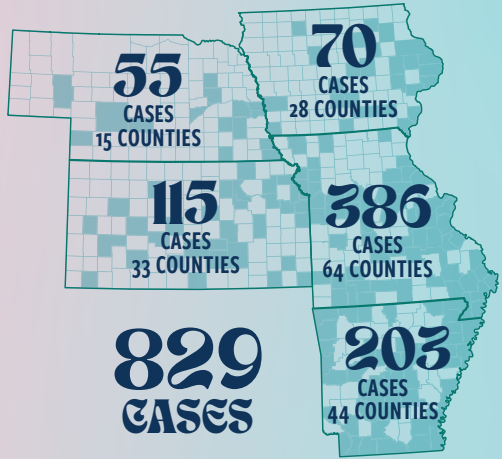
2022 IMPACT

Our numbers are significant because each one represents a person—a person who needs our help. Your commitment creates an impact greater than we can quantify.

Case Status

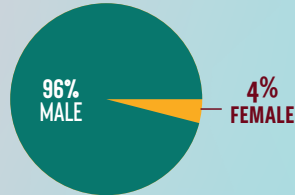


Cases By State

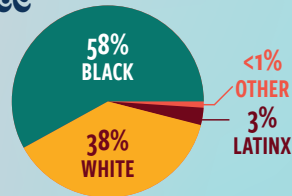


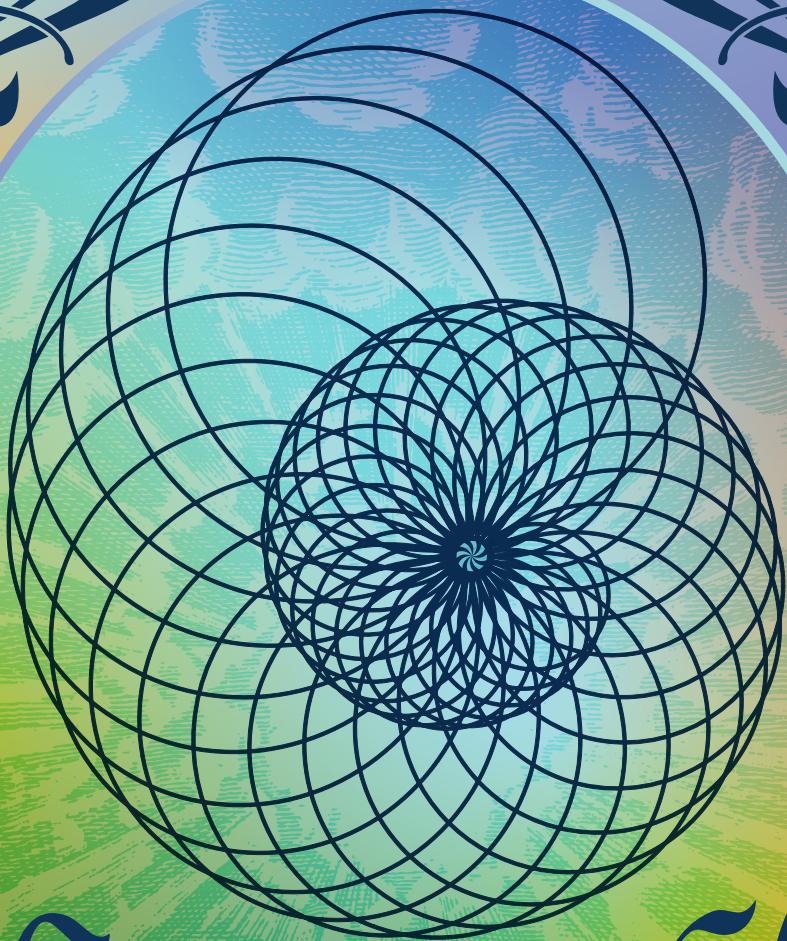
Client Demographics

GENDER



RACE





RESILIENCE

When storm clouds gather, seek your center for peace in the eye of the storm.

When the world is turbulent, channel an inner power and dedication to your cause so you can take action in alignment with your values. Discipline, willpower, commitment—you have enough resilience within to face what comes.

RESILIENCE

More than a decade ago, Ricky Kidd and Anthony Dixon worked in an office together. On its surface, not so strange — people work in offices together all the time. But in the mid-2000s, both were incarcerated at Southeast Correctional Center in Missouri. Together, they worked as clerks in the prison's Institutional Activity Coordinators Office.

Years later, long after each had transferred to different prisons and lost touch, things started to come full-circle. Ricky, who'd been imprisoned for 23 years for a murder he didn't commit, walked free in 2019. Two years later, Anthony was also released—freed, but not exonerated despite DNA evidence proving he'd wrongfully served 28 years for a rape and robbery he did not commit.

Now, almost 15 years later, Ricky and Anthony work in an office together once again. But this time, it's MIP's office—former clients turned colleagues. Ricky is our Community Engagement Manager, and Anthony our Office Assistant.

“To look up and hear that Anthony had gained some traction in his case and was making his way back home, and then to look up and see us working in the same office, but on the other side of freedom... you can only imagine that relationship and bond.” – Ricky Kidd

“Even as a support person, I have a lot of enthusiasm because we know the hope we're giving someone else,” Anthony said. “The time it takes to get an innocent person out of prison, if we can do anything to speed that up, I'm glad to do it. Before, it was attorneys doing all the computer work or troubleshooting. That's an attorney that could be doing attorneys' work. It means the world to me that I can help.”

Bringing on former clients as employees is a concept other innocence organizations could strive for. Doing innocence work without actively involving those who have been directly impacted—it's like “setting up fishing rules without talking to fishermen,” Anthony said.

It's true. We can't, and shouldn't, do this work without the guidance of the most important people—the wrongfully convicted. Both Ricky and Anthony are integral to MIP's work—for their talent and skill sets, but also for their firsthand perspective and their resilience.

“How do you spring back from a wrongful conviction and then go back in and work for these organizations, or go inside courtrooms again or prosecutors' offices?” Ricky said. “The short answer is understanding there's value in my presence. There's another wrongfully convicted individual on the other side benefiting from that presence.”

For both Anthony and Ricky, their resilience while still imprisoned came from knowing there were people on the outside working to set them free. Now, it's the opposite: their resilience and continued commitment to the cause comes from knowing there are still people on the *inside*, waiting to get out.

“We know what it means to have someone on the other side fighting for you,” Anthony said. “We know the hope and promise that's being offered by that.”

WISDOM



Knowing *what* you know is only half of knowing
—be aware of both the seen *and* unseen.

On the path to wisdom, we often fail to concede that which we do not know.

By acknowledging this duality, you can break barriers to true sageness.

Through experience and learning, you can develop good judgment and
know when to trust your intuition or seek further knowledge.

WISDOM

There's an ebb and a flow to wisdom: we have to develop it. But to keep the pace of progress going, we also have to commit to giving it away. While so much of this year has been about training others, expanding our reach beyond our 5-state region, it's also important to recognize how we're growing and developing our own.

After 7 years at MIP, Rachel Wester has moved up to become our Managing Attorney. She previously spent time as a staff attorney, then Nebraska Managing Attorney, and now has the responsibility of leading our entire legal staff. She retains her own caseload, but plays a larger role in big-picture planning, consulting on others' cases, and establishing our litigative priorities.

"I look at where our caseload and wait list are from a 360-degree view and decide what comes next, what our priorities are, where we can assign resources, and what cases need what resources, whether that's an investigator or a DNA test," Rachel said.

Much of what Rachel's learned since she joined us in January 2015 has included litigative strategies and the post-conviction legal structure of our 5-state region. But because innocence work is a marathon, wisdom is not just gaining knowledge. It's gaining endurance—learning what you need in order to stay the course.

"A lot of the wisdom I've gained is about the nuance of how these cases play out in reality and the importance of client relationships," she said. "The Midwest in particular is a hard area to work in. We're facing different kinds of pressures in a region where it's very

difficult to do post-conviction work. What's become clear is how long these cases take and how complicated the process is. The only way to navigate cases for that long is to center your client in everything you do."

That client-centered approach is just one core value at MIP. Our expansion has been spurred by another simple philosophy: bring in excellent talent, develop their skill sets, give them space to grow, and empower them to teach others what they know.

Investigator Blair Johnson, for example, started as a volunteer, then a contractor, then a full-time staffer. Now she leads roughly a dozen investigative trainings each year for staff, interns, and other innocence advocates nationwide. Project manager and research coordinator Summer Farrar also began as a volunteer, then wrote a grant herself that funded her full-time position. She's been an invaluable member of our staff since.

"There was attraction to the work because of how critically important it is — but also realizing I can develop professionally here," Summer said. "MIP has given me a lot of room to train myself and identify the things I'm really passionate about."

Now, all three are spreading their knowledge: Rachel, by passing on wisdom and strategy throughout our litigation, Blair through her training programs, and Summer by publishing her research. Together, we're attacking the criminal legal system from all sides. That ability grows directly from developing our internal staff—and empowering them to do the same for others.

**Wisdom is something we gain.
But it's also something we have to pass on.**



REFLECTION

Look within for wisdom—see the impact of your inner work reflected out into the world surrounding you.

We cannot change the past, but its lessons can help shape the future you desire. By coming face-to-face with any regrets, you can approach your future with kindness and the knowledge that what was no longer has to be.

REFLECTION

As we look forward to set our future path, we should reflect on our history. Below are MIP's highlights from the past 10 years.

13
CLIENTS
FREED

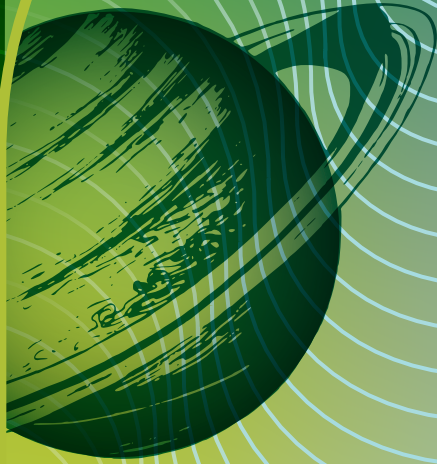
338+
COMBINED YEARS
CLIENTS SERVED
IN PRISON

6
PARTNER
ORGANIZATION
RELATIONSHIPS
ESTABLISHED

8
LAWS
ENACTED

1
SOCIAL WORK
PROGRAM
LAUNCHED

- 2001** ♦ MIP FOUNDED AT UMKC SCHOOL OF LAW
- 2013** ♦ MIP CREATES NEW INTAKE PROCESS; ROBERT NELSON EXONERATED.
- 2015** ♦ MIP ENTERS PARTNERSHIPS WITH KU, IOWA STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER WRONGFUL CONVICTION DIVISION, AND NEBRASKA INNOCENCE PROJECT
- 2016** ♦ FLOYD BLEDSOE IS EXONERATED; MIP RECEIVES FIRST BLOODSWORTH GRANTS TO PARTNER WITH IOWA STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER AND INNOCENCE PROJECT OF IOWA. *Kansas - SB 428 addressing eyewitness misidentification.*
- 2017** ♦ JUNEAL PRATT FREED; RICHARD JONES AND LAMONTE MCINTYRE EXONERATED. *Kansas - SB 112 enforces the recording of an entire custodial interrogation.*
- 2018** ♦ RODNEY LINCOLN GRANTED CLEMENCY; FAYE JACOBS FREED; JOHN BROWN FREED. *Kansas - HB 2579 allows for compensation of the wrongfully convicted upon release.*
- 2019** ♦ RICKY KIDD EXONERATED. *Iowa - House File 734 reforms post-conviction DNA testing. Nebraska - LB 352 leads to reform surrounding the use of jailhouse informants.*
- 2020** ♦ JOHN BROWN EXONERATED; OLIN "PETE" COONES EXONERATED. BRYAN CAVE FELLOWSHIP BEGINS. SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM LAUNCHED. MACARTHUR JUSTICE CENTER PARTNERSHIP BEGINS. *Kansas - Alvin Sykes Cold Case Task Force created to make recommendations for closed case DNA hits. Nebraska - LB 881 removes ban on eyewitness identification expert testimony at trial.*
- 2021** ♦ KEVIN STRICKLAND EXONERATED; ANTHONY DIXON FREED; RONTARUS WASHINGTON CHARGES DISMISSED. *Missouri - 547.031 gives a prosecutor the power to file a Motion to Vacate to exonerate a wrongfully convicted person.*
- 2022** ♦ MICHAEL POLITTE FREED.



EXPANSION

**Space creates opportunity
for new discovery & transformation.**

The ripples of our energy expand, radiating into the world to touch infinitely more lives than we could imagine. When we expand we feel free from the forms and structures that can hold us back from achieving our true potential.

EXPANSION

Within MIP's 5-state region, an estimated 4,000 people are incarcerated for crimes they didn't commit. At any given time, hundreds of people are on our waiting list. Roughly two dozen are in litigation.

In a battle as large as the one we're fighting, growth is not just a nice-to-have. To match the scale of wrongful convictions in our region, expansion is critical. Growing our staff, supporter base, and resources has been a focus since our inception. But this year, thanks to you, MIP has seen tremendous growth in capacity that will help us touch more lives, bring more innocent folks home, and build the infrastructure of a better criminal legal system.

We've added two new staff attorney positions, hired a Deputy Director, brought on an investigative fellow, and expanded our social work program. With more resources, staff, and student programs, the pace at which we can review cases on our wait list has improved dramatically.

"We've always had pressure points on the waitlist where things get stuck because we don't have enough resources to move cases from point A to point B," said Managing Attorney Rachel Wester. "With our grants and expansion, students and staff can finally take the time to analyze waitlist cases, and we've seen a huge difference in the amount of cases we can review and move forward."

As we've expanded over the past few years, so too has our reputation. Several of this year's new hires moved from somewhere else in order to be part of our work. Alex Aparicio is one. A Connecticut native, she'd

been working as a judicial clerk in New Mexico before moving to St. Louis as our new staff attorney. Learning about some of MIP's more forward-thinking projects, like our social work program, immediately piqued her interest. "I just had this experience of getting sucked in, and the more I learned about the organization, the more I said, 'All right, this is an honest-to-god dream job.'" Alex said.

Meanwhile, that social work program expanded, so we can offer more support services for current and freed clients. Courtney Ellis moved to full-time staff, and we added a second intern to support her workload.

Zach Buchanan, who took over our UMKC student clinic, also moved from elsewhere (Phoenix, Arizona) to be part of our mission. Chelsea Mitchell brings over 15 years of public defender experience to leading our Mizzou student clinic. Our investigative fellowship expands our capacity to dig into the facts of cases before litigation. And Marissa Todd joined our staff as Deputy Director. She'll provide much-needed development and administrative support, lead finance and marketing, foster donor relationships, and more. Finally, a new federal grant allows us to extend our capacity in Arkansas, where post-conviction procedures are particularly challenging.

"MIP has had success in Arkansas, but our work has been limited," said Rubi Cordova, our new staff attorney for the state. "Now we have this grant that's Arkansas-specific and we have more resources to spend there. It's a good opportunity to get in the state and try to set legal precedent there that's not only going to help current clients, but hopefully clients in the future."

For as large as the problem of wrongful conviction has grown, we have to keep pace. We have to expand faster and wider than the scale of the issue. Because of you, we've taken bigger strides than ever.

VISION



Your mind and the world are reflections—
what you believe shapes your experience.

Envisioning a different paradigm is powerful, but seeds of potential require energy to sprout. Be careful of beliefs that limit your potential. Dare to imagine the impossible to be true and see what unlocks. You have what you need to create what you desire.

VISION

When progress is made, a natural reaction can be... “*What do we work towards next?*”

That’s the spot we find ourselves in this year at MIP: celebrating progress and expansion, but with an eye to the future. We know we’re not done yet. For as long as people in power uphold an unjust legal system, fight exoneration of innocent people, and resist justice and fairness, we’re not done.

The truth is, when we come together, we’re just as powerful as the people making the rules.

We can hold them accountable, push them to pay attention to what matters, vote them in (or out), and celebrate those who do the right thing. The more noise we make together, the closer we get to a legal system that doesn’t imprison innocent people.

It doesn’t stop there. The even bigger vision we’re pushing towards is one in which society recognizes that innocence work is not just about innocence work. It’s one cog in the wheel of the criminal legal system. But this work can lead the way in building a better system for everyone.

“Innocence is a lens to change the whole criminal legal system,” said MIP executive director Tricia Rojo Bushnell. “If people can understand this happens to innocent people, they can see this affects every defendant. We represent innocent people but we know we’re changing the system for the better for everyone.”

As we work toward that vision, we know what it will take: Dedication. Resilience. Wisdom. Unity. It will take a commitment to gaining knowledge and experience—then giving it away as much and as widely as possible.

So much of our year at MIP has been about passing that wisdom onward.

“We’re building the next generation of leaders,” Tricia said. “It’s really exciting we’ve matured to a point where we’re not just trying to get people to listen. We’re getting action, we’re coming together, we’re investing into people of the future, and we’re empowering other leaders.”

That progress is all thanks to you—our supporters, donors, and advocates.

The Innocence Network encompasses 71 regional chapters. It says a lot about the work we do (and the dedication of supporters in this region) that MIP is tapped for leadership and expertise by the entire network. It’s why our support base—that’s you—is more critical than ever. **It’s important to recognize that donations sent nationally to the Innocence Network or the more well known Innocence Project don’t fund MIP’s litigative, advocacy, research, or social work.**

But direct donations to MIP make a direct impact on clients and laws in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri.

And by continuing to fund our work, you’re also continuing to fund our leadership that reaches to the national, and even international, level. That’s the power of a community that looks locally first. Start small, commit, come together—then amplify the results to a wider audience.

So that’s what we’ll keep doing. Spurred by your donations and support, we’ll keep fighting for a legal system that works for the good of all humanity.

“In such a slow-moving, cards-against-you criminal legal system, you need all the help you can get,” said staff attorney Alex Aparicio. “And you need all the people you can get who are willing to fight.”

FORTUNE



The wheel is always turning—up or down.
Sometimes it's just a matter of perspective.

Is it fated in your stars, or just dumb luck? Waiting for fortune to find you is all well and good, but sometimes you can turn the wheel on its head seeking golden possibility among the waste. Who knows? It could happen to anybody.

FORTUNE

The word *fortune* has multiple meanings. In the traditional sense, it can mean wealth. But *fortune* can also mean destiny, or fate.

And sometimes, one begets the other. Those who share their fortunes with us — whether it's \$20 or \$2,000 — help us create a new fortune for those affected by wrongful conviction.

We craft our destiny by what we give our resources to. And so we pour our time, energy, and money into creating a more just criminal legal system. Because of you and your generosity, a better future is taking shape.

There is larger value to your donation than simply helping us expand services, hire more people, or take on new cases. If that's all we were focused on, we would only be treating the symptoms of the disease.

But we want to eradicate the disease.

When you choose to donate to our mission, you're creating concrete, real-time value in the lives of our clients—like through our social work program, or via more thorough investigation into their case.

When you donate, you're contributing to solutions for the future, by funding our advocacy and research work.

We've seen some of that evolution this year. We'll continue to celebrate the victories you've helped us create. But we'll also keep pushing forward, because we know it's not yet enough. No innocent person deserves the fate of wrongful incarceration. And we have the power to write a better story.

When you donate, you are the energy that helps shapeshift unjust systems. Will you join that collective energy today?

Your donations help us attack the problem of wrongful conviction from two ends: helping those impacted, and creating systems in which fewer people are impacted.

**Scan to donate today,
or visit theMIP.org**



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