

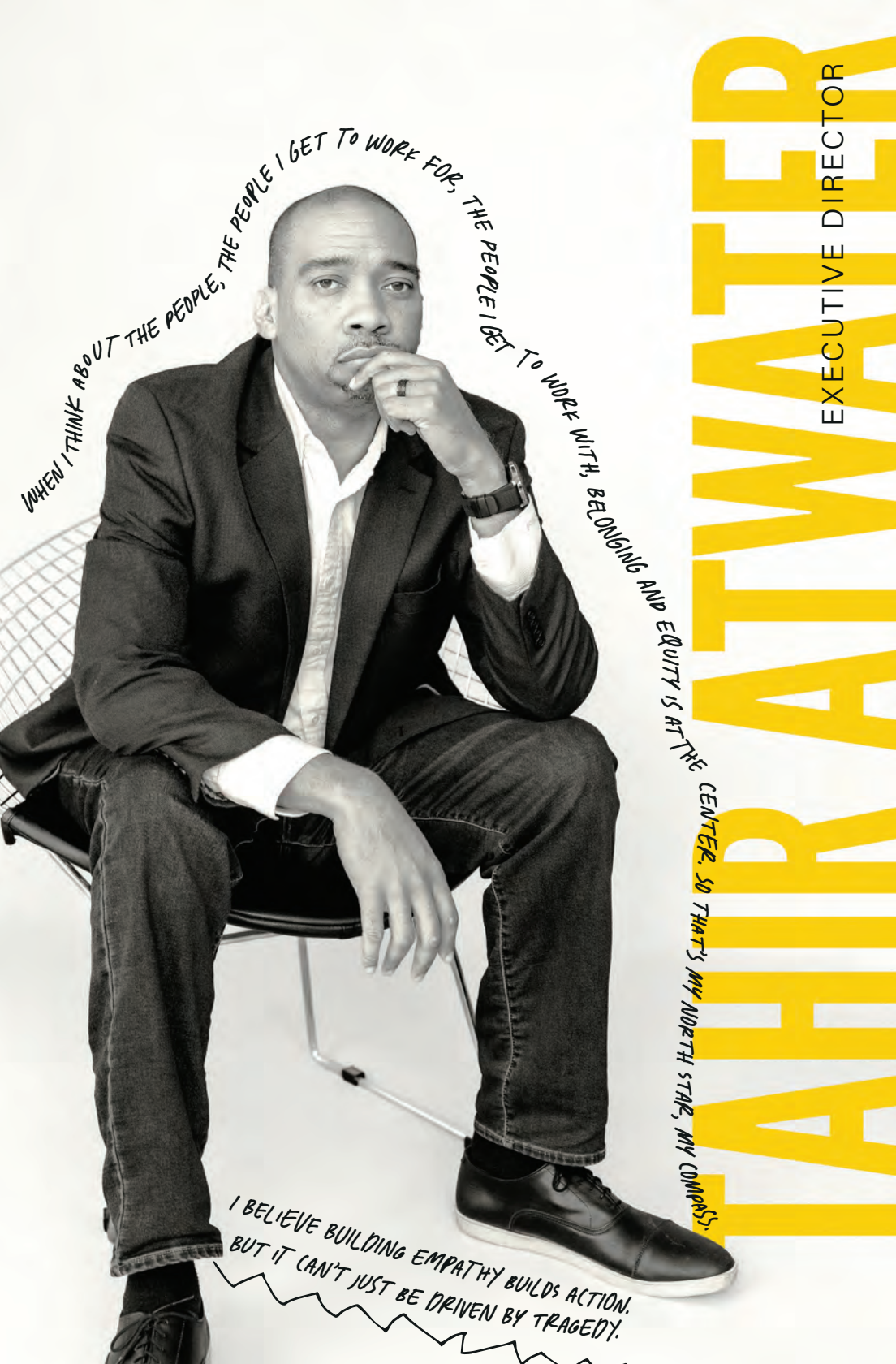


Midwest
Innocence
Project

WE ARE

The Light

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



EMPOWERING OUR TEAM & MISSION

USING OUR COLLECTIVE POWER—FUELED BY YOUR SUPPORT—WE’LL KEEP RADIATING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

In my first month as MIP Executive Director, I visited one of our currently incarcerated clients. There were no clocks in the room. The minutes oozed by, as if they were twice their normal length.

At the end of the day, I got to go home. Time sped up again. But for that client—and every other wrongfully convicted person waiting for justice—time continues to move glacially. There is nothing more urgent than speeding up that clock.

As Executive Director, that’s the work I’ll empower our team to keep doing. I come to this role with a passion for building justice and a deep respect for the work MIP has done. To be part of that legacy is a gift. *To add to that legacy is now my responsibility.*

To this point, my career has revolved around being a champion for belonging and equity. In the fight for justice, those concepts are vital. What does it mean to belong to a society in which justice isn’t accessible for everyone? Who receives justice? Who loses it? And who has the power to close that gap? We do. You do.

In this year’s annual report, you’ll read about a few of MIP’s clients who have refused to let wrongful conviction extinguish their own lights. *Let their stories ignite hope in you.*

But, despite these victories, darker forces remain: systemic issues that cause wrongful convictions, from hostile regional legislation to flaws in investigative procedures. You’ll read about the 360-degree work MIP does to prevent wrongful convictions, litigate current cases, and support freed clients as they come out on the other side. You’ll also meet the people who have dedicated themselves to this work. *Their stories remind us that change is possible—and that it takes all of us, together, to create a future where justice is real.*

There’s a gap between today’s reality and our hope for the future. There’s a gap between the criminal legal system in which we operate now and the justice system we seek to build. Closing that gap—and keeping people from falling into the crevasse—is urgent work. Join us in radiating light on the systems that need it most.

There is no time to waste.



Photo by Aaron Mefford

Cedric Warren
EXONERATED CLIENT

RECLAIMING A LIFE

YOUR HUMANITY IS WHAT THEY TRY TO SEPARATE YOU FROM. THEY LITERALLY TELL YOU THAT 'YOU'RE NOT A HUMAN.' I'VE LITERALLY BEEN TOLD, 'HE'S NOT A HUMAN — HE'S AN INMATE. HE'S A NUMBER.'

To pass the time of his 50-year prison sentence, Cedric Warren used to watch “Below Deck,” a TV show about a superyacht crew in Greece. Now, Cedric is thinking about heading to Santorini himself.

That’s the difference an exoneration and nearly a year of freedom makes.

Cedric walked out of prison for the last time on December 11, 2024, after nearly 16 years of wrongful incarceration.

In the 11 months since, Cedric has made up for lost time. For a fresh start, he moved to Atlanta, where one of his brothers lives. He got his first driver’s license. He traveled to New York and Seattle. And his bucket list is even bigger:

“Since they tried to tell me I was going to be in prison for 50 years, I’m going to see 50 states,” Cedric said. “I’m going everywhere.”

Despite the ambitious travel plans, Cedric also enjoys just doing *nothing*. He no longer has to wake up at 4 a.m. to sign up for a slot to use the prison phone. He doesn’t have to worry about lawyer

meetings, or arbitrary prison rules, like not eating the extra cookie his cellmate didn’t want. (“I can’t make this up,” he said. “I got a write-up for that.”)

“I just wake up and live,” he said. “I wish people could see life the way I see it now, because they would definitely enjoy it to the fullest. I don’t take nothing for granted.”

Cedric understands viscerally how precious life can be. Part of his character and appreciation for each day comes from his mother. Even as she was lying in a hospital with cancer, she was still making (and winning) Super Bowl bets. She would still wake up the whole family at 7 a.m. for prayer circles about getting Cedric home.

Unfortunately, Cedric didn’t get to see her in person before she passed away in 2018. But as he continues to rebuild his life of freedom, he carries her resiliency and light with him every day.

“That (resiliency) is something I was blessed with from my mama,” he said. “She’s living through me now.”

FIGHTING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

OUR GOAL ISN'T JUST TO GET CLIENTS OUT OF PRISON: IT'S TO PREVENT CASES LIKE THEIRS FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

After 34 years of wrongful conviction, Christopher Dunn was exonerated in July 2024. But as he tries to restart his life, a giant cloud hangs overhead.

Despite two judges and the local prosecutor's office agreeing Chris is innocent, the Missouri Attorney General's office seeks to overturn his exoneration and send Chris back to prison. The office has deployed unprecedented legal strategies to fight against Chris's freedom.

Chris's case is a grim example of why MIP's behind-the-scenes policy work across our five-state region is so vital.

From a lack of legal mechanisms to pursue innocence claims in Nebraska, to a lack of open records access in Iowa, to elected officials appealing an exoneration in Missouri, legislatures and courts in this region often fail to uphold justice.

In addition to litigating cases, our Legal Department at MIP works with our policy partners at the Innocence Project and other local stakeholders to draft bills, meet with legislators, and advocate for reform.

"In representing the innocent, we uncover patterns of injustice across our region," said MIP Legal Director Rachel Wester, who spearheads our legal and policy work. "That insight drives our policy priorities and helps us change laws and practices so we can prevent wrongful convictions before they happen."

Overturning wrongful convictions is already an uphill climb. But when that climb is combined with the weight of legal and political hostility in our region, we have to fight even harder.

With your support, we'll keep speaking truth to power. We'll keep persevering, despite unfriendly policy and extraordinary opposition.

Meanwhile, the patience and grace of our clients keeps us going.

"For Chris, the fight to gain and keep his freedom requires an unfathomable level of perseverance, and it's inspiring," said Rachel, who's been with MIP for more than a decade now. "Being here year after year means I've seen what it takes to win freedom: persistence, skill, and the strength to keep going, no matter how long it takes."

THE STATE HAS TAKEN THE IDEA OF FINALITY OVER FAIRNESS
TO AN EXTREME WE'VE NEVER SEEN.



WE DON'T JUST FIND TRUTH...

*We make it
undeniable.*

ILLUMINATING OUR INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

BEFORE MIP'S LEGAL TEAM CAN FIGHT FOR OUR CLIENTS IN COURT, THE INVESTIGATIVE TEAM BUILDS A FOUNDATION OF TRUTH AND FACTS FOR EACH CASE. HERE'S AN INSIDE LOOK...

01 PICKING UP THE PIECES: CASE REVIEW & ANALYSIS

We begin with what the system left behind: disorganized files, missing records, and official narratives that often don't add up. From those fragments, we construct our own analysis — truth and fact-based.

02 CHARTING THE COURSE: INVESTIGATION PLANNING

We map the work ahead, compiling a complete list of investigative needs, prioritizing by impact, and sequencing steps with legal goals in mind. The plan evolves as new facts emerge.

03 KNOCKING ON DOORS: INFORMATION GATHERING

We leave our desks to find what the old files can't — new witnesses, new records, and new evidence. Through persistence and trust-building, we uncover information lost to time, distance, or neglect.

04 BRINGING TRUTH TO LIGHT: TRANSLATING FACTS TO EVIDENCE

We assemble gathered facts into credible, corroborated evidence. By triangulating sources and verifying details, we advance the investigation to litigation — where the truth is not just found, but made undeniable.

Blair Johnson leads our investigative team — and has developed gold-standard procedures and systems that have been replicated across other innocence organizations. She's been invited to teach workshops on these practices, and our work in the Midwest continues to have a ripple effect nationwide.

BY THE *Numbers*

1 CLIENT
EXONERATED



8 CASES IN
LITIGATION



9 CASES IN
INVESTIGATION



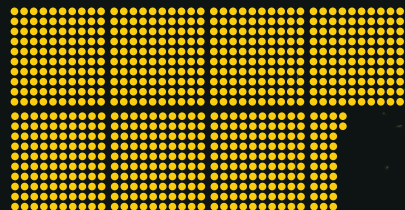
103 APPLICANTS ON
INVESTIGATION
WAITLIST



60 APPLICANTS
IN SCREENING



732 APPLICANTS ON
WAITLIST TO
BE SCREENED*



As of August 2025.

* Cedric Warren was released in December 2024, after the 2024 annual report publication.

Waiting for Justice

NEBRASKA
63
IN 15 COUNTIES

IOWA
74
IN 35 COUNTIES

KANSAS
139
IN 28 COUNTIES

MISSOURI
396
IN 63 COUNTIES

TOTAL OPEN
APPLICATIONS

912

TOTAL AREA OF REGION COVERED BY MIP
338,785 SQ-MI

ARKANSAS
234
IN 49 COUNTIES

BLACK
56%

WHITE
37%

HISPANIC/LATINX
4%

OTHER
2%

UNKNOWN
1%

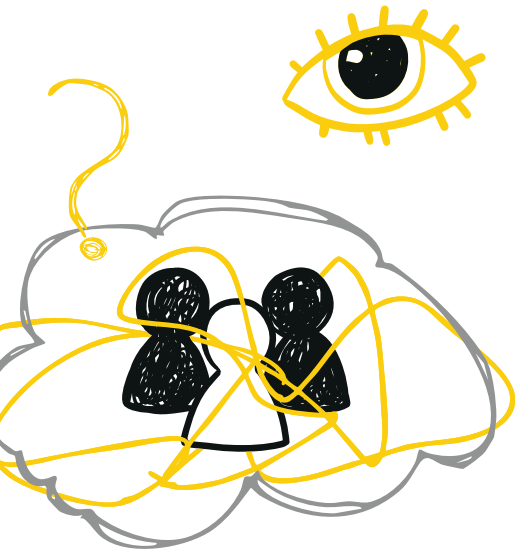
MIP IS AN AN INDEPENDENTLY FUNDED INNOCENCE ORGANIZATION.
ALL DONATIONS MADE TO THE MIDWEST INNOCENCE PROJECT
STAY WITHIN OUR FIVE-STATE REGION TO DIRECTLY IMPACT CASES LOCALLY.

IMPROVING A FLAWED PROCEEDURE

Think of the last time you went into a store. Do you remember the face of your cashier or the person ahead of you in line?

Picture this person's face clearly in your mind. What color were their eyes? How long was their hair? What were they wearing? Did their shirt have a collar? Did they have any tattoos or other identifying marks? Any jewelry?

Now ... are you sure?



Mistaken eyewitness identification can lead to wrongful convictions. According to the National Exoneration Registry, 27% of exonerations involve mistaken witness identification. That's 1,008 cases, and a collective 13,072 years of wrongful incarceration.

MIP is at the forefront of research into the root causes of wrongful conviction, including how misidentifications happen. A reliance on human memory — which is inherently risky — is only part of the story. Investigation practices may also compound known problems with identification procedures.

This year, we're concluding a research project into these investigation practices, led by Dr. Margaret Bull Kovera at John Jay College of Criminal Justice - CUNY. **We aim to shine a light on errors leading to misidentification — and identify ways to prevent them.**

When you support MIP, you not only support litigation to free the wrongfully convicted. You also fund an organization doing the front-end work to prevent those convictions from happening at all.

This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBIA-22-GG-03921-WRNG awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

I DON'T HAVE THE POWER INDIVIDUALLY TO BEND THE SYSTEM TO MY VERSION OF JUSTICE. BUT THAT'S WHERE MY SENSE OF HOPE COMES FROM: THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE HELPING US DO THIS WORK WHO SHARE THE SAME SENSE OF OPTIMISM AS I DO THAT JUSTICE IS POSSIBLE...

IF WE KEEP FIGHTING FOR IT.



Summer Farrar, project manager for this research initiative, has been with MIP for nearly a decade, contributing to investigative, research, and development efforts. Her experience-based wisdom grounds the team while ensuring they never lose sight of the bigger picture of justice.

A DREAM (FINALLY) REALIZED

WITHOUT THE MIP SUPPORTERS, THESE LAST 10 YEARS WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE. WITHOUT PEOPLE DOING WHAT THEY CAN, I WOULD NOT BE HERE TODAY. THIS WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE.

Growing up on 160 acres of farmland in northeastern Kansas, Floyd Bledsoe always felt connected to nature and animals. He dreamed of owning his own farm one day. He loved dogs, and throughout high school, he milked cows—until he was arrested for a crime he didn't commit.

In that moment, and the next 16 years, Kansas stripped Floyd away from his family's land, his animals, and his freedom. The state put him in a cell only a few feet wide.

After his 2015 exoneration, Floyd has been busy reclaiming his space—and recently celebrated his 10-year freedomiversary.

"I've been surprised at how fast 10 years went," he said. "When I was in (prison), it seemed like an eternity. But time really does fly."

After a decade of freedom, he now owns multiple businesses, including a mobile tire service and 500+ acres of farmland. In Hutchinson, Kansas, he recently opened Bledsoe's Serenity Homestead & Farm: a tract of land where he offers

an event space, classes, farm fresh egg sales, and the chance to meet and feed animals. Geese, chickens, horses, pigs, cows, and even exotic animals like emus, ostriches, and a wallaby are all there.

"I just love animals and it brings me a lot of peace and joy," he said.

MIP's support, especially in his first few years of freedom as he regained his footing, helped Floyd stay the course: "*In essence, MIP became my family*," he said. "They always encourage you. They don't question your sanity. They tell you to follow your dreams."

Now, Floyd has the time and space—both physical and mental—to reclaim his lifelong goals.

"One of my dreams was to have my own farm and animals," he said. "Now I've got my main farm and my milk cows and baby calves and baby goats. It's fulfilled most of everything that was lost. I've been able to restart."

To schedule a tour at Floyd's farm, visit bledsoehomestead.com.

Floyd Bledsoe
EXONERATED CLIENT

THE PEACE
AND NATURE
JUST CHANGES
EVERYBODY.
IT'S BRINGING
ME BACK
TO MYSELF.





A YEAR OF OUTREACH CONNECTIONS

SUPPORT GROUP **830**

FORMAL CLIENT
CHECK-INS *(post-release)* **299**

INFORMAL CLIENT
CHECK-INS *(post-release)* **85**

CONTACT WITH CLIENT
SUPPORT PERSON **73**

INNOCENCE NETWORK
CONFERENCE COMMS **44**



**TOTAL
CONNECTIONS** **1,331**

Between September 1, 2024 — August 31, 2025

What These Numbers Mean:

Each outreach depicted here represents a meaningful connection—whether it was a quick check-in, a formal meeting, or group support. These **1,331 touchpoints** reflect our ongoing care and stability that help freed and exonerated individuals rebuild their lives.



Our work
connects
clients to
their
humanity

Courtney Ellis, LMSW, and Lindsey Pfannenstiel, MSW, comprise our small, but impactful, social work team. Their effort to connect and help our clients retain their sense of hope and humanity shows the 360-degree commitment MIP has to serving our clients—within and beyond incarceration.

EVEN THOUGH
I'M NOT
TOTALLY
FREE, IT
DOESN'T
MEAN THAT
I CAN'T LIVE
THAT WAY.
YOU KNOW,
ACTUALLY LIVE.

Faye Jacobs
FREED CLIENT

BE THE LIGHT

In the face of hostile policy, complex post-conviction law, and a criminal legal system that's failing to uphold the word "justice," we have a choice in what to do.

We can cover our eyes and ignore reality. We can sit back and wait for wholesale change. We can give into despair.

Or we can be the light amidst that darkness.

We can shine a spotlight on injustice. We can demand change *now*—because each moment an innocent person spends in prison is one too many. We can refuse to back down from the challenges of this moment.

It is impossible to ignore the urgency and magnitude of the choice between taking action and accepting today's status quo. *Which path will you commit to?*

With your donations, MIP will continue to choose action — to be the light inspiring hope.

We'll keep fighting for our incarcerated clients and the freedom they deserve. We'll keep supporting freed clients like Faye, Chris, Cedric, and Floyd, who are the sparks of hope that keep us going. We'll continue advocating for structural reform to prevent wrongful convictions in the first place.

And we will keep treating wrongful convictions—and the failures of the criminal legal system—as the emergencies they are.

Join us in this urgent fight.

I REFUSE TO ALLOW WHAT HAPPENED TO DEFINE ME. I AM DETERMINED. AND I'LL FIGHT — AS LONG AS THERE'S A BREATH IN MY BODY — FOR MY EXONERATION. I WILL NEVER, EVER GIVE UP THE FIGHT.

Faye Jacobs spent 26 years in prison for a crime she didn't commit. Although she's now in her seventh year of freedom, thanks to a sentence commutation, she's still fighting for an official exoneration. The challenge of continuing to carry a criminal record motivated Faye to pursue entrepreneurship, and she's now the successful owner of *Safe. Safer. Safest. Transportation*.

Not only did the generosity of MIP donors help fight for Faye's freedom. They've also helped support her as she's grown her company—and stepped into her power.

Read more about Faye's journey by scanning the QR code below:





ABOUT MIP

MIP's mission is to educate about, advocate for, and obtain and support the exoneration and release of wrongfully convicted people in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. We are an independently funded innocence organization that is a part of the national Innocence Network. Our partnerships with law firms, law schools, and student volunteers allow us to provide the very best representation at no cost to innocent people within our region.

All donations made to the Midwest Innocence Project stay within our 5-state region to directly impact cases locally.

The Midwest Innocence Project is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation.

Contributions are tax deductible.

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ONLINE
TODAY.**



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MIP would like to recognize and thank our creative team for helping us tell our story with unflinching integrity and bravery:

Creative Direction & Design:
Annie Monfort

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