

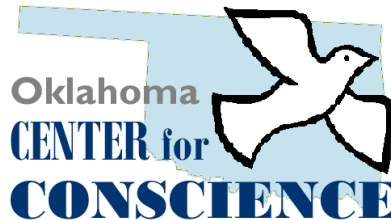
The Oklahoma Peace Post

VOLUME I, ISSUE 1

November 14, 2009

Peace Festival Special Edition

- Work Without War workshop
- Rethink Afghanistan
- Supporting our work with GIs



OCC Responds to the Fort Hood Shootings

Like the rest of the country, we were saddened to learn of the tragic shooting at Ft. Hood on Nov. 5 that killed 13 people and wounded over 30 more, and grieve at the senseless loss of life. We join other groups within the GI Rights movement to respond from the perspective gained from years of work with servicemembers and veterans with physical and hidden wounds.

We may never know the full

story of what happened on November 5th, and why this act of violence took place. Regardless of the emotional pain a person may be experiencing, there is never an excuse for violence. Because our organization is committed to the cause of peace, we grieve the tragic outcome of violence. We also seek to get to the root causes of all forms of violence, so that we can work to prevent such tragedy in the future.

It in this desire to get to the root cause of violence, that we ask a difficult question: Did the failure of the military mental health system play a role in the alleged actions of MAJ Hasan?

We believe it may have. In our work as G.I. Rights counselors and advocates, we see first hand the poor quality of mental health care provided in the military. We

(Continued on page 3)

Help our youth find "work without war"

We had the privilege of hosting a fantastic counter-recruitment workshop this summer featuring the expertise of Ft. Worth activists from Peace Options. Now we're moving forward with reaching out to Oklahoma City high schools with our "Work Without War" project. We invite you to join us, and especially to tell young people about this opportunity to get involved.

We've got a couple of meetings scheduled, and will also be adding a section to our website to promote and facilitate this project. Get involved!

Saturday, Nov. 21 - planning meeting at 1:30 pm at Red Cup coffeehouse, 3122 N. Classen. Organizing for our workshop in January, and planning for other outreach opportunities.

Saturday, Jan. 9 - CR in-

tensive at Scissortail Social Space, 3012 N. Walker, from 1 to 3:30 PM. We'll be doing hands-on training, role-playing and introducing volunteers to the best resources for their own education on the topic, and the best tools for raising public awareness.

Mark your calendars and plan to attend. Students especially needed for peer outreach!

The Oklahoma Center for Conscience seeks to help individuals consider the relationship between war and conscience, and to support those who are discovering and expressing a personal understanding of that relationship. We engage in this work through:

- Education and action on military recruitment and non-violent career choices
- Resources and services for conscientious objectors and war resisters
- Programs and presentations on conscience development, understanding of violence and methods of creating peaceful communities and nations

Film & Discussion

Brave New Foundation Presents

RETHINK Afghanistan



From Robert Greenwald the Director of *Outfoxed*, *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, and *Inq* for Sale
rethinkafghanistan.com

A new documentary by
Brave New Films

Sunday, Nov. 22

Church of the Open Arms
3131 N. Penn, OKC

4:15—Early seating and refreshments
4:30— film begins
5: 59—discussion

Sponsored by Peace House & OCC

OUR CRITICAL WORK

OCC's GI Rights Hotline helps service members, veterans and their families

By Moses Mast

Oklahoma Center for Conscience was started with two concerns: First, to assist soldiers who no longer wish to serve in the military, with special attention to those who want out for conscience sake. Second, to counsel youth before they enlist about the realities of war, and options for those who have enlisted but later regretted it. There is great need for this counsel because at their most vulnerable age our youth are enticed with promises that do not have to be kept, and deceived with no sense of accountability to provide them the whole truth. Our country spends millions to snare our youth in this manner, making our military not a true volunteer force.

OCC was formed by groups



Moses and Sadie Mast staff a table for OCC on International Peace Day, Sept. 21. Photo by John Walters

and individuals from the peace community in Oklahoma City. Joy Mennonite Church serves as the host church, with support from members of Catholic Peace Fellowship, Veterans for Peace, and Quakers of OKC. Later, Eastern Oklahoma Pax Christi in Tulsa added their endorsement.

These are all small groups, only able to provide very modest monetary support. We raise funds from those in our community who support our mission, and that brings me to the purpose of this message: seeking your help.

What any donor wants to know is: How will the money be used? Let me explain where bulk of our budget goes.

We have lay counselors trained in military law answering calls to our Oklahoma G I Rights Hotline. Someone trained in psychology does evaluations that help in court cases. All these serve as volunteers.

Our greatest expense is providing legal services, and this is our most urgent need for assistance. James M. Branum, our attorney on staff, is helping as many as 40 clients at any one time. His work also requires lots of travel, as court cases are at the client's home base.

James charges a modest fee for those who can pay. Sometimes parents pay for legal counsel. There have also been other organizations that have paid for legal counsel. This still leaves a good number who cannot pay. To cover these cases, OCC pays James \$400 a month.

If you observe James at work, besides being skilled in military law James is able to speak about the moral issue of war without imposing his beliefs on another.

Most of those who ask for our assistance have not formed a conscience about violence and war. They are more often troubled people who cannot adjust to military discipline. Our policy is to address the concern they bring to us. Often we can do no more than explain what to expect from certain decisions. We have, however, had some very rewarding experiences that have cheered us on the way.

- Camilo Mejia, after serving a tour of duty in Iraq, was troubled with his experience and took a stand as a conscientious objector. For this he was incarcerated in the military prison in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. After his release we provided lodging for him and his fam-

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ily the first night. Later Camilo returned to Oklahoma to participate in forming an Oklahoma chapter of Catholic Peace Fellowship

- Jake Malloy, a sincere young Christian man, wanting to do the right thing as he was taught and understood, enlisted in the military to defend our freedom and way of life. Jake was sent for training to Ft. Sill, OK. During training Jake realized he was being trained to kill; as a follower of Jesus he realized he could not do this. When he refused to train he was severely threatened, but Jake remained firm. His application for conscientious objector status was refused. Our attorney helped him with an appeal, and Jake was granted a less than honorable discharge. Later Jake returned to Oklahoma with his wife and child,

his parents and grandparents, and at Joy Mennonite we had a service of celebration.

- Daniel Sandate served a tour in Iraq but after a short leave in the states, did not return to duty but fled to Canada to escape the war. Daniel was one of the first ones deported from Canada. Attorney James Branum represented Daniel in his trial. Daniel served his sentence at Ft. Sill. After his release from prison, because he had no family or place to go, we invited him to come to

Oklahoma City to have some time to adjust to life again. Daniel has since become active in Joy Mennonite Church and in the community and has been a delight to be with.

In addition to these examples, James, as our attorney, has represented others who took the stand as conscientious objectors. He reports an increase of those who oppose war as conscientious objectors.

We have spoken to university and high school classes. We have literature tables at peace events and at places where

youth gather. We have spent hundreds of dollars for literature and anticipate our expense for literature will increase.

If you would like to participate with us in this work you can contact us via email: mosesmast@gmail.com. Or you can mail us: Moses Mast, 504 NE 16, OKC 73084. If you wish to write a check, make it out to "Joy Mennonite Church" and earmark it for "OCC."

Thank you for your prayers and support. We wish all of you well in your efforts to bring peace to the world.

Support our work

You can mail donations to us at:

OCC
504 NE 16th
OKC, 73104

Or, to use a credit card, visit our web site, centerforconscience.org. Donations are tax deductible.

Thank you!

Response to Ft. Hood, continued

have worked with suicidal clients who have been told by their commanders to "suck it up." We have seen soldiers denied access to prescription drugs that are needed for the treatment of mental illness. And we have seen many cases of mentally ill soldiers, not only being denied appropriate care, but also stigmatized and/or harassed for seeking it out.

Based on these observations, we echo the call to action made by Iraq Veterans Against the War, in a letter to President Obama dated November 10, 2009:

We ask that:

1. Each soldier about to be deployed and returning from deployment be assigned a mental health provider who will reach out to them, rather than

requiring them to initiate the search for help.

2. *Ensure that the stigma of seeking care for mental health issues is removed for soldiers at all levels—from junior enlisted to senior enlisted and officers alike.*

3. *Ensure that if mental health care is not available from military facilities, soldiers can seek mental health care with civilian providers of their choice*

4. *Ensure that soldiers are prevented from deploying with mental health problems and issues.*

5. *Stop multiple redeployments of the same troops.*

6. *Ensure full background checks for all mental health providers and periodic check ups for them to decompress from the stresses they shoulder*

from the soldiers they counsel to the workload they endure.

Furthermore, we call for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops from the Middle East. The current wars are not sustainable. The US cannot continue to occupy Iraq and Afghanistan without continuing to neglect the welfare of those who serve.

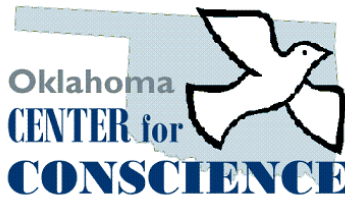
Finally, we at the Oklahoma Center for Conscience affirm support for those on the ground working for peace at Fort Hood and Killeen, Texas. We stand in solidarity with the Fort Hood chapter of IVAW and the Under the Hood G.I. Coffeehouse. We are thankful for their conscientious stand for all service members and veterans.

Action Alert

Oklahoma Senator Tom Coburn has placed a hold on a bill that would help veterans and their caregivers obtain much needed health care and compensation. Please contact Sen. Coburn and, as a constituent, demand that he end the hold and allow the bill to be voted on.

Leave a message for the senator at his office in Washington D.C. at 202-224-5754 or Oklahoma City at 405-231-4941.

Send an email from this web page:
<http://tr.im/emailcoburn>



Oklahoma Center for Conscience

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Oklahoma City, OK 73104

Phone: 405-236-4938
Press: 405-615-2700
GI Rights Hotline: 405-231-1138

OCC was founded in 2004 and is supported by Joy Mennonite Church, Veterans for Peace of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Catholic Peace Fellowship, the Oklahoma City Religious Society of Friends and Eastern Oklahoma Pax Christi.

OCC is funded by community donations and private grants.

We ask you to think about war.

Bits & Peaces

The Peace Report

OCC's co-founder and staff attorney, James M. Branum, has begun publishing an occasional newsletter called *The Peace Report* to keep his friends and supporters "in the loop" about his work defending GI war resisters, aiding conscientious objectors and supporting the GI Rights Movement. The first issue includes an article James wrote for the *Oklahoma Revelator* called "90 Years of GI Resistance in Oklahoma." Subscriptions help fund James' important work. peacereport.org



Ellsberg's memoir

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation Distinguished Fellow Daniel Ellsberg is releasing installments of his memoirs *The American Doomsday Machine* through the NAPF's website. Ellsberg spent six years researching and consulting with the US government on nuclear war planning, and is best known for releasing the Pentagon Papers in 1971. <http://wagingpeace.org/menu/issues/nuclear-weapons/ellsberg.htm>

The Honest Recruiter

New updated edition of Sgt. Abe, the Honest Recruiter is now available. This is THE essential counter-recruitment tool, so make some copies and have them handy for distribution to anyone thinking of joining the military, or of recruitable age.

Young people should make this life-changing decision with ALL the facts, and not the selected spin given by recruiters. The site also has the handout in Spanish, as well as a video.

<http://thehonestrecruiter.org/>



SFT Abe, the Honest Recruiter