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**The Inner Workings of the Wings Ministry:
A Compelling Organizational Story**

I would like to describe an organization to you and see if you can guess what it does and who it serves. It is characterized by people and activities that are: understanding, informal, kind, sensitive, honest, merciful, and compassionate. The organization operates with integrity and is filled with people who not only care, but offer themselves to others, building relationships with one another. They provide networking, help, mentoring, empowerment, and a taste of “normal” life. They are uplifting and function as sowers of the seeds of hope. They strive to provide safe environments, information, and positive role modeling. The organization builds bridges between groups who should connect, but often do not. Their work transforms lives, breaks destructive cycles, and removes social stigma.

What comes to mind?

Outreach to the homeless? To those with terminal illness? To the poor? To the disabled community? I could list many more possibilities before you would likely arrive at the right answer. Why? Because the focus for this organization is a group that would fit into the Bible’s definition of “the least of these” mentioned in the Book of Matthew.

Wings Ministry is a Christian outreach program to the *families of prisoners* based on the Word of God, The LOGOS Program, and the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets approach. The LOGOS Program models Acts 2:42 and is a Christian youth ministry approach in over 38 different denominations around the world consisting of Play Time, Choir/Worship Skills/Singing, Family Time/Eating together and Bible Study. The central approach used by Wings for their parties builds on The LOGOS Program and is comprised of:

- 1) Celebratory, Positive Atmosphere
- 2) Games

- 3) Crafts
- 4) Family Photos (only in prisons)
- 5) Music
- 6) Interactive Fellowship/Bible Study
- 7) Mealtimes (Pizza, cookies & punch)

The activities are age-appropriate, hands on, and educational. The LOGOS System Associates believe that nurturing youth and children into right relationships of faith with God through Jesus Christ is the most important thing the church ever does and Wings has expanded this idea to include connecting *families of prisoners* to God. The Search Institute believes that faith communities have tremendous potential for building assets and nurturing the healthy development of young people. Search Institute seeks to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the faith community to contribute to young people's growth in body, mind, and spirit. Essentially, the assets model is focused on expanding the support that build up the strengths of children and youth resulting in resilient young adults.

There are religious and secular components to the Wings Ministry. The Wings for L.I.F.E. Program – Life-skills for Inmate Families & Education, is a secular outreach program that is designed to support and strengthen the life-skills of families with loved ones in prison. Examples of Wings for L.I.F.E. workshop topics include: How to Stretch a Dollar; Single Parenting; Discipline; Holiday and Traditions; Maximizing a Visit; What To Do in an Emergency; and Homecoming. Manners are also taught, including manners for eating out in a restaurant; telephone manners; and manners needed in all walks of life. Families also have a chance to get to know each other and expand their support network. Another important component of the Wings Ministry outreach is that it intentionally works to connect prisoners and their families to churches in the faith community who can provide ongoing support beyond what Wings offers. This is key because most churches struggle to find appropriate ways to support their congregation members who have family members in prison and sometimes they actually scorn the family, which only increases the family's shame.

The words used to describe how families feel and how they are seen by society are generally not positive. Families often feel isolated, invisible, embarrassed, shameful, and conflicted. They are truly the forgotten victims of crime, those most overlooked by the system and by our society. They suffer greatly by association and if the family unit is not strong, the odds of successful reintegration when the prisoner is released are even worse than usual. Perhaps the most compelling aspect to family outreach is to help the children who are the most vulnerable to the negativity surrounding

imprisonment. They must deal with the absence of a parent, the difficult visits at the prison, and the shame of trying to answer questions from peers and teachers. Moreover, their own chances of going to prison, whether they know it or not, skyrocket after having a parent in prison. From a developmental standpoint, helping these children develop resiliency skills against the odds is critical not just for them, but for our nation.

The Wings Ministry has a charismatic, resourceful, intelligent, and driven Christian woman at its core. Ann Edenfield Sweet has articulated her own family's experiences in her book entitled "Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One" and went on to do outreach in prisons and congregations. After living a "perfect life", by all accounts, she was shocked to realize how quickly the social climate changes when a family member goes to prison. It was not enough for her that she somehow navigated multiple systems and survived with her four boys intact and thriving. She felt called by God to reach out to other families who have been impacted by imprisonment because she just knew in her heart that they were essentially adrift in an ocean with a leaky lifeboat. Her vision for the Wings Ministry built on her own experiences, both positive and negative. She took the positive aspects of outreach in the faith community and crafted them into an approach to parties that could happen in prisons and in the community. The response from everyone concerned has been overwhelmingly positive, whether you are speaking of prisoners, family members, volunteers, wardens, or the faith community.

You might ask why people would volunteer to do outreach to the families of prisoners when the situation is so depressing and the statistics are so negative. Volunteers have stated that all of their stereotypes have been broken through the Wings Ministry and that they might dread the long drive to a prison, but once they get there all of that fades away. They speak of sensing in their spirit that "it is the right thing to do" or that "they have been called to do this outreach." The people involved with Wings vary in their motivations. Some have loved ones who are or were in prison or they themselves were in prison before. Most know firsthand the social stigma and ignorance that the families experience both in the prison system and in their own community. Perhaps the most beautiful part of Wings is that Ann has developed it as what one volunteer called, "a ministry within a ministry." This means that every person who volunteers has an opportunity to use their own particular skills, whether it is photography, grant writing, singing, or cooking. They get personally invested in the Wings Ministry and it is obvious that it "does their hearts good."

When asked why they are involved with Wings, many shared simple examples of seeing the changes in body language, participation, talking, and

facial expressions at the parties. They see inmates take what might be their first family portrait and get tears in their eyes when they relate how by the end of a party, the children are playing and helping “just like normal kids.” From the perspective of someone from the Corrections Department, Wings is a way of “helping us help them” because inmates are on their best behavior in anticipation of a Wings event and therefore require less disciplinary action. When asked why a Christian outreach program is appropriate in a government institution, the response was that because it is voluntary and the events comply with all rules and regulations. The Corrections Department supports the Wings Ministry as a positive option for inmates and their families. It was also made clear that other groups could sponsor events if they followed the same procedure Wings did to get approval for their events. The Corrections Department is in the business of incarceration and therefore welcomes programs that provide positive support to the inmates and their families.

At the heart of the success of the Wings Ministry is a shared system of values and the direction of a servant-leader named Ann Edenfield Sweet. It raises the question of where wisdom and courage reside (as discussed by Sheila McNamee¹). Ann’s story and actions have galvanized the Wings Ministry and have connected with people in a personal and personalized way. Ann provides the inner compass of the organization, while giving autonomy to others. The question about where wisdom resides is most relevant because the demand for Wings has begun to surpass even Ann’s ability to be in more than one place at a time. It is imperative that the spirit of this ministry be clearly articulated and felt by all who would like to see it expand. A key idea to consider is that wisdom or knowledge exists in what transpires *between* people, not within one person. Ann’s wisdom comes to life in her interactions; it does not exist in isolation. Why is this a powerful concept to explore? Because if Wings can describe the quality of Ann’s interactions with others and the qualities of the actions of volunteers and participants, then you will be very close to “bottling” Wings for mass distribution.

Too often programs focus on the what (i.e. parties, programs, newsletters) and not on the how. I would daresay lots of other Christian groups could host parties, but would they be as effective as Wings? Probably not. Why? Because Ann has intentionally “actionized” her values in every aspect of the organization from her voice mail greetings, emails, and her facilitation of Wings Parties. It is easy to overlook this or to dismiss it as, “That’s just Ann!” But it goes much deeper than that into archetypal touchstones that can be activated by anyone who is fully committed to this ministry.

¹ McNamee, Sheila (1998) . “Re-Inscribing Organizational Wisdom and Courage: The Relationally Engaged Organization” in Srivastva, S. and Cooperrider, D.L. (Eds.) (1998). Organizational Wisdom and Executive Courage. San Francisco: The New Lexington Press.

Suggestions for the Wings Ministry Board of Directors

In a recent interview on leadership, Oprah Winfrey was asked about the secret to her success and one part of her answer stated: “I understand that the common denominator in the human experience from the thousands of people that I've talked to is that everybody just wants to be heard. Having that understanding and that connection has really given me wings to fly because I know that I can talk about anything to anybody with a sense of respect and integrity.”² Ann Edenfield Sweet comes from a similar place of respect and integrity when reaching out to an extremely disenfranchised group, the families of prisoners. She does not come from a place of pity and passivity. She activates the inherent power of each person to realize their own abilities, to be actively seeking and open to the resources in the community, and to not lose hope. Her strong Christian faith provides the foundation for each and every decision she makes related to Wings. However, the organization must distill this further because as we all know, everyone can interpret God’s word differently and in some cases, it may not align with the spirit of Wings Ministry. It is clear that the Wings Ministry embodies timeless values in a contemporary manner that crosses social divisions.

Organizational Development

As the Wings Ministry receives invitations to visit ministries in other parts of the country and to travel to the other side of the world, it is more important than ever to do this outreach in a way that has organizational development in mind. I would like to suggest that the organizational development of the Wings Ministry centers on three things: Values, Value, and Valued. To expand on this, see the table below.

Values	This ministry is faith-based and inspired by the Word of God. Identify the strongest 3-5 values and operationalize them for each role within the organization.
Value	The organization holds clear value for the volunteers and most importantly, for the families; otherwise they would not participate and return repeatedly. Identify ways to measure and assure that value is consistently

² Newsweek, October 25, 2005 issue.

	delivered.
Valued	Everyone associated with Wings feels valued. Delve deeper into why that is true and operationalize the actions and attitudes. This will be helpful in finding new coordinators, volunteers, and board members for Wings as it expands.

The Mission of Wings is described as:

The Wings Ministry brings families of prisoners and Christian volunteers together as Children of God by:

- Providing ecumenical mission opportunities for local congregations worldwide;
- Conducting joyous celebrations of Christ's unconditional love that breaks down barriers; and
- Building relationships that transform both the lives of the families and the mission of the congregations.

Per my analysis of the interviews, I noticed that the primary emphasis for all was on the families of prisoners, especially the children. I would recommend that the mission statement be re-ordered so that the last bullet and the first bullet trade spots. The fact that Wings provides ecumenical mission opportunities for congregations is a much-needed and useful activity, but it makes the families of prisoners seem like a means to an end, when in fact it would seem like the opposite is true. The actions of faith communities are a means for families to be supported. The transformation of lives through relationships informed by Christian principles is at the heart of Wings. For some it is a part of their mission work and for others it is a lifeline to community and congregations, but for all it is building relationships that enhance their strongest values in action.

An area that could be developed further in the ministry relates to positive youth development and formalizing a youth/adult partnership (YAP) model for Wings. There are youth associated with the Board and that is a plus, but there are other ways that youth could be developed as supports to the organization. One interviewee said that kids could be trained to actually present and run support group activities to do outreach to other youth and to educate adults on the real experiences that kids have as well as possible joint solutions. Many young people are also very technologically savvy, aware of buzz words and lingo that would reach more youth, and have great initiative. Ann is very aware of the Search Institute Assets model and has used aspects of it to inform the Wings structure and events, but it would be exciting to convene a focus group with young people who have been involved with Wings to see what their minds and spirits generate. The results could then be considered by the Board and Ann for new ways young people could grow with the ministry.

Advocating and Evaluation

Additionally, it appears that Wings also has a component that could be described as activist or somehow advocating on behalf of the families of the incarcerated to address the dominant social stigmas, ignorance, and myths that devastate the lives of thousands of people every year. It would be interesting to discuss as a Board what amount of organizational resources might be devoted to advocacy from the perspective of 501 (c) (3) limitations as well as internal organizational priorities. There is also a potential for becoming a model program that when analyzed provides great insights for the correctional community related to “what works.” Outside evaluation of the organization’s programs in the future should also be a central budget priority. When done properly, evaluation provides great Return on Investment for day-to-day operations, sustainability, and expansion.

Governance

The Board of Directors for the Wings Ministry has been very much a “working board” as contrasted with a “governance board.” As Wings grows, there will be a need for clearer cut divisions between those who do the work and those who govern the organization. Sarbanes Oxley (SOX) is a compelling piece of legislation passed in 2002 related to the governance of publicly traded companies, but it also has implications for the nonprofit sector³. I recommend that the Board of Directors receive training related to SOX and continuous support to maximize Board effectiveness and contributions to the Wings Ministry.

Documentation/Promotional Opportunities

As far as documenting the work done by Wings, it seems that there are many areas that could be strengthened.

1. My impression is that as a missionary-type organization many of the contributions from Board members and other volunteers were just given freely without much thought to how tracking them could benefit Wings. People seemed to give without wanting credit, which is admirable, but does not give accurate numbers to the in-kind support Wings receives. In-kind is a major component of how grant applications are evaluated and could affect whether Wings is seen as a solidly sustained entity (see Exhibit A).

³ More information on this can be found at <http://www.boardsource.org/clientfiles/Sarbanes-Oxley.pdf>

2. From an evaluation standpoint, tracking the numbers at parties/events is a good start as is getting feedback comments. However, it would seem that a customized evaluation at this stage would be a good idea to try to track the impact Wings has over a sustained period on a given family. It would be elaborate and costly to do a larger study with a control group, but it might be an option if a relationship could be forged with an academic institution.
3. Another useful type of evaluation would be based on the Most Significant Changes technique, which is a systematic way of collecting impact stories and then analyzing them for insight and connection to current mission.
4. The brochure online is very descriptive of the benefits of Wings Parties. It could be enhanced with a quick “how you can be involved” section as well as with a summary on the needs of the organization and how donations are used.
5. You might also include a call to sign up for your email list, because the more it grows, the more you could attract appropriate advertising from sponsors that could help support the organization’s mission.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this organizational story assessment. I learned a great deal from my interviews and review of Wings material and found your organization’s work to be very inspiring. This assessment is a snapshot of the organization that ideally will provide impetus for positive developmental changes. Exhibit B contains the raw data summarized from the interviews in the event that it would be useful for future organizational development.

Completed form is submitted to Wings Ministry, attention Ann Edenfield Sweet
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EXHIBIT A (page two)

Eligible in-kind expenses include "assets that are essential to a project's success that otherwise would be purchased and paid for by the recipient."

Note: The following list of possible in-kind contributions is not meant to be exhaustive.

General Organization Categories:

Publicity
Donated services for a fundraising event
Hosting an event
Staff/Security for special event
Speaking
Performing
Providing food or beverages
Providing decorations
Gifts for "goodie bags" for events
Developing new programs
Travel Expenses
Staff Time
Printing/Duplicating
Postage
Taking/Developing Pictures
Giving workshop/facilitating discussion at Wings-related event
Indirect Costs such as phone, internet, fax, materials used to support Wings work in a given region
Donated office space, furniture, phone, internet, fax
Supervision of Wings volunteers
Costs for Professional Development of Wings Staff/Board/Volunteers

Possible Volunteer Time Categories:

Stuffing envelopes for a mailing
Maintaining your web site to include link to Wings, description of Wings events
Contributing to Wing's newsletter
Working on Wings-related events: setting up, greeting guests, cleaning up
Strategic Planning or other volunteer/reduced fee service

EXHIBIT B

INTERVIEW NOTES SUMMARIZED/GROUPED

What is the Wings Ministry?

Christian Ministry
Word of God
Christian Principles
Faith-Based Group
Faith Community
Secular & Religious Components
LOGOS
Outreach
Search Institute

Parties
Games
Crafts
Hands On
Age Appropriate
Family Photos
Music
Life Skills
Keep families together
Education
Teaching
Assets
Guidepost sweaters

Who does Wings serve?

Families
Kids
Generational
Educating Public

Incarcerated
Isolated
Invisible
Forgotten Victims of Crime
Embarrassment
Shame
Conflicted

Most Overlooked
Reintegration Issues

What is Wings like?

Informal

Kind

Understanding

Sensitive

Honest

Merciful

Integrity

Compassionate

Neat

Taste of Normal Life

Transformative

People Who Care

Provide Networking

Offer Self

Human to Human

Uplifting

Sowers of Seeds of HOPE

Positive Male Role Modeling

Removing Stigma

Icebreaker between people and congregations

Help

Emotional

Break cycle

Safe

Provide information

Help get more control of life

Mentoring

Empowerment

Add glue to cracked parts

Kids feel like they accomplish something by helping at events

What is Wings structure?

I do what I'm told by Ann

Hands On Board

How to Package Ann's Story

Finite Amount of Time: How to Best Channel Ann

Ann gives everybody the chance to use individual skills & talents, like a

“ministry within a ministry”

Support team with God as foundation

Why be involved with Wings?

All my stereotypes have been broken

People come back/High Demand

Smiles

See that it is not the end of the world and you can learn from it
(imprisonment of self or loved one)

Dread long drive to prison, until I get there!

Changes in eye contact, body language, participation, talking

Never saw this shy inmate in this positive light; he was smiling and glowing

Sense in Your Spirit
Faith=Doing What Called to Do
People willing to help, but don't know what to do
Son in prison
LOGOS Youth Director before
Went to LOGOS church
Many volunteers have first hand experience=more credible
Book
Invited to a party
In jail before
Has ministered to me personally
"The least of these..."
Corrections Perspective: Inmates look forward to it and are on best behavior,
way of helping us, helping them
Makes Step Children feel like Biological Children

What are the organizational underpinnings of Wings?

Secretary: responds to letters. Keeps letters in a file with replies saved in computer. Keeps logbook with notes on correspondence.

Mission

Vision

Bylaws

Board Meeting Minutes

3,000 name database

Need real retreat to reflect on what God is calling us to do with Wings

LOGOS

Volunteer Training before Prison Parties

Tracy: \$ Finances, Ann: Vision

Stewardship

Assets training would be good

"On the job training"

In Kind Tracking

Videos of Events

Track # of Attendees at Parties

Newsletters

Feedback Sheets

Lots of Photographs

Vision in 10 Years:

All over U.S., maybe the world
Raise consciousness of churches
Set down guidelines for affiliates
Wings ABQ = controlling factor
Stay on Task: Families (can't do it all)
Lot more volunteers
Produce/publish materials on approach
Continue what doing now, but more focus on kids (prevention to break pattern), parenting classes, child development
More clearly defined board w/more paid staff
Become model program
Education of society about incarceration, lessen stigma
Prepare kids to run meetings
Wardens/guards, etc, in no wise speak negative to prisoners (echoes feelings/words that got them there in the first place)
More family support: one night of just support, moderated to ensure focus on positive, not just complaining about the system
Strengthen relationship with the Corrections Dept—explain voluntary nature of participation and the fact that other groups are welcome to offer similar events by following procedures, regulations, rules, etc and getting official approval

Marissa's Notes on Themes from Organizational Articles that Might Be Relevant:

Knowing Heart → Heart of Organization

Continuous openings/closings make the organization a living organization

Amer. Psychological Assoc now focusing on love, work, play rather than disease, malfunction

Appreciative Inquiry...in contrast to: Attempting to fix problems, which breeds more problems

Focus on developing core competencies of org, shared consensus, images to guide

Mystery vs. problem

Life-giving nature of values, beliefs, ideology to organize collective action

Believing Game vs. Doubting Game

Service Mission: Self as Others

-- end --