

Group offers conversation to the lonely

By Ann Schottman Knol
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Some inmates of the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion are marooned in prison for years, with no sign that anyone in the outside world gives a damn about them.

Families turn away in disgust or lose interest, and inmates are left isolated in a tense, violent prison world.

The Prisoner Visitation and Support group is a national group of volunteers who visit federal prison inmates, to try to make up in a small way for severed ties to the outside world.

The Rev. Ted Braun of Carbondale remembers that he once visited a Marion inmate who hadn't had a visitor for 10 years.

"That's sad. I know he was just very grateful for a chance to talk to somebody from the outside," Braun said.

"When I started visiting in 1974, I visited several guys who had been locked up in the hole — 18 months in solitary confinement," Braun said. "They had a hard time talking because of their experience. One guy had to look at the wall. People bothered him."