



2013

## 2013 Year in Review

Northern California Innocence Project

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## 2013 Year In Review

2013 was a banner year for the Northern California Innocence Project in every respect. We made significant progress on our mission to promote a fair, effective and compassionate criminal justice system and protect the rights of the innocent. Here are some highlights:

### Leadership Transition



*David Onek,  
Executive Director*

In April, Santa Clara Law School named David Onek as the new Executive Director of NCIP. Onek replaced founder Cookie Ridolfi, who continues in her role as professor at the law school. Onek is a long-time criminal justice reformer who has served as a Commissioner on the San Francisco Police Commission, as Deputy Director of San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's Office of Criminal Justice, and as Executive Director of the Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice at UC Berkeley Law School.

### Three Exonerations

On July 3rd, NCIP client **George Souliotes** walked free after serving 16 years in prison. Together with our pro bono partner, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, we spent ten years investigating and collecting evidence to discredit the faulty forensic analysis used to convict him of arson and triple murder in a deadly 1997 Modesto fire. The court found compelling evidence of innocence based on our investigation and ordered a retrial. With just weeks to prepare, another pro bono partner, Morrison & Foerster LLP, volunteered to spearhead the defense trial team. Ultimately, the State of California conceded that it could not prove the fire was deliberately set and Souliotes was released from prison after his attorneys successfully negotiated an agreement to secure his immediate freedom.

Souliotes is now living in Southern California with his sister and is happily reunited with his two adult sons. He tells us he has taken up dance lessons and is gradually learning to use his new smartphone.



*George Souliotes hugs NCIP  
Legal Director Linda Starr,  
who championed his case for  
more than 10 years.*



*Ronald Ross embraces  
his mother after learning  
of his exoneration.*

Earlier in the year NCIP and pro bono partner Keker & Van Nest successfully exonerated **Ronald Ross** after he served nearly seven years of a 25-to-life sentence. Ross was wrongfully convicted of attempted murder based on faulty eyewitness identification, which is one of the leading causes of wrongful convictions. Through more than four years of investigation, Ross's legal defense team and volunteer investigators uncovered evidence of false testimony by key trial witnesses, including the victim, and tracked down exculpatory evidence from several new witnesses. In the face of this overwhelming proof of innocence, the Alameda County District Attorney dismissed the charges and ordered Ross's release.

In March the Alameda County Superior Court overturned the wrongful conviction of **Johnny Williams** for sex crimes he did not commit after new DNA evidence proved his innocence. Williams had already served 14 years in prison and was forced to register as a sex offender. Forensic tests at the time of trial were unable to confirm biological evidence, and no DNA testing was performed. Williams' exoneration was made possible by NCIP's commitment to this case and a federal grant that created the California DNA Project, which paid for the DNA retesting of the victim's clothing.



*Johnny Williams and NCIP Attorney Melissa O'Connell, overjoyed at his exoneration.*

From January 1 to October 31, 2013, **798 people sent us letters asking for help. Our attorneys are currently working on 47 active cases.**

### **Legislative Victories**

In 2013 NCIP was instrumental in passing two crucial pieces of California legislation that were signed by Governor Brown. The first bill, **SB569, sponsored by Sen. Ted Lieu, helps to prevent false confessions of juveniles accused of murder by requiring that police departments videotape these interrogations.**



*From left: David Onek, Franky Carrillo, Sen. Mark Leno.*

The second bill, **SB618, sponsored by Sen. Mark Leno, streamlines the process for the wrongfully convicted to receive compensation for their erroneous conviction.** We are especially proud to note that two NCIP exonerees, **Maurice Caldwell and Franky Carrillo**, traveled to Sacramento to urge state representatives to pass these bills. Our exonerees are becoming powerful and effective advocates.

### **Revamped Legal Clinic**

NCIP's clinical program at Santa Clara Law School has grown exponentially in the past eleven years, graduating over **700 students** since 2001. These students are graduating with not only key lawyering skills, but also a developed sense of their ethical obligations as future lawyers.

We revamped our clinical program in 2013 so that students take the course for a full year, rather than one semester, which provides a deeper educational experience for the students and provides greater support to our clients.

### **Training for Law Enforcement**

NCIP is established as a leading expert on eyewitness identification, one of the main causes of wrongful convictions. NCIP presented on best practices in eyewitness identification to both the California Police Chiefs Association and the California State Sheriffs' Association. We are already planning for a major Eyewitness ID Symposium we will be hosting with law enforcement partners in 2014.

### **We Need Your Support**

We celebrate these victories as a community thanks to the support of individuals like you. We need your support to continue this great work! **Please make a year-end gift to NCIP via the enclosed envelope or online at [www.ncip.scu.edu](http://www.ncip.scu.edu).** Join us as we exonerate more innocent people and reunite families, and reform the criminal justice system.