

## Epic production

Audiences at "Les Misérables" on Aug. 16-17 in Kingsport will see the show grow to larger-than-life proportions. **Page 2E.**



# OUTCASTS

## What does it cost when a parolee goes back to jail?

*New documentary explores the effects of recidivism*

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**R**yan Elliott spent years in and out of prisons and jails for drug-related offenses. Today, he has a full-time job, a place to live and a chance every Thursday night to minister to the men staying at the John R. Hay House — the very place that gave him the tools to reenter society as a responsible, productive citizen.

Elliott is one of several former Hay House clients featured in a soon-to-be-released documentary that looks at the high cost of recidivism and its effect on communities in Northeast Tennessee.

"Outcasts: Surviving the Culture of Rejection" explores the history of recidivism, as well as what writer and director Stephen Newton calls the culture of rejection and why it may unwittingly contribute to the high rate of recidivism in Tennessee, where half of offenders return to prison within three years.

Produced by Jane Hillhouse, of Hillhouse Video Works in Kingsport, "Outcasts" will premiere in early 2014 on Knoxville's East Tennessee PBS station. An initial screening of the film will be held at Northeast State Community College's Wellmont Regional Center for the Performing Arts. Dates for the screening and premiere haven't been announced.

Elliott, 41, was 19 the first time he was jailed. When he was placed at Hay House, the only non-profit residential treatment center in Northeast Tennessee, he found people there willing to listen, and willing to provide his essentials — a place to sleep, three meals a day, clothing and a job placement.

"When I came out of prison, I didn't have anywhere to go. It was a structure and a foundation for me," Elliott said. "With Hay House being there when I got out of prison, I knew I wasn't going to go back [to prison]. I didn't have to worry about going back at all. It was just what I needed until I got my apartment. I knew that's what they were there for. I knew they wanted to help me."



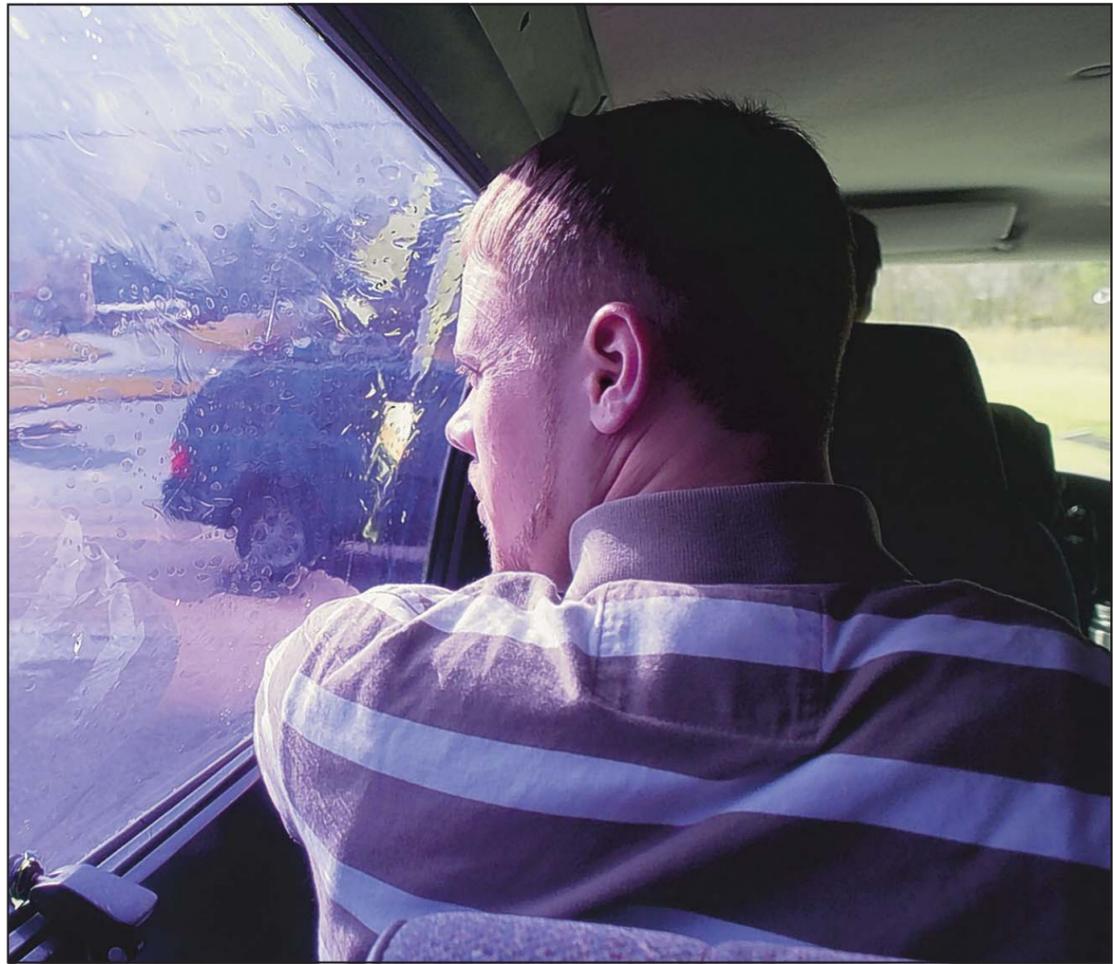
David Wood

**Ryan Elliot believes Hay House helped him get his life straightened out after spending years in and out of jail.**

Hay House is a residential treatment program founded in 1981 to help criminal offenders reenter society as responsible and productive citizens. Hay House costs taxpayers less than one-tenth that of imprisonment and has been recognized as a model program by the Tennessee State Department of Corrections. National recidivism rates indicate that more than 40 percent of released offenders return to prison within three years. In Tennessee, that rate is 50 percent. Hay House, in contrast, has a more than 90 percent success rate.

Stephen Newton had never given much thought to what it's like to be incarcerated, then released from prison with minimal belongings. Then he heard the story of an inmate who had been arrested in his underwear. When he was released from the Sullivan County Jail, he exchanged his prison stripes and dressed in his only belongings, that same pair of underwear.

"I tried to imagine myself standing in front of the jail in my underwear, a marked felon with no place to go, no money, no family to greet me, and ultimately no hope. Like so many others, I was unaware of what it must feel like to be an outcast," Newton wrote in his blog, found at [www.cultureofrejection.org](http://www.cultureofrejection.org).



"Outcasts: Surviving the Culture of Rejection" focuses on programs, such as the John R. Hay House, the only non-profit residential treatment center in Northeast Tennessee, that help parolees re-enter society. (photo by David Wood)

ofrejection.org.

"I tried to put myself in his shoes," he said. "You're still marked as an outcast, a felon for life. You're still expected to pay a financial retribution back to the community," he said.

Newton began researching the issue and uncovering alarming facts. He couldn't shake the image of the man standing in his underwear and began to envision that as the opening scene of a movie.

What he discovered was this: The United States has more people incarcerated than any other country in the world, with China and Russia coming in second and third. One out of 107 Americans is behind bars, and one out of every 34 is under some kind of correctional supervision, according to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics' report "Correctional Populations in the United States" (November 2012 Bulletin).

Newton initially wanted "Outcasts" to focus solely on Hay House, but has since expanded the project to feature other regional programs, including StepStone Youth Treatment Services, Frontier Health, Families Free and First Baptist Church's Celebrate Recovery. Tennessee programs outside this region include Judge Norman's Davidson County Drug Court. National organizations interviewed include the Justice Policy Institute and Criminal Justice Policy Foundation in Washington, D.C.

"It's been a pretty amazing story, and it's gotten bigger and big-



David Wood

**Filmmaker and writer Stephen Newton shot his documentary "Outcasts" throughout Sullivan County. Here he films Sullivan County Sheriff Wayne Anderson at the Sullivan County Jail.**

ger and bigger," Newton said. "What is happening is legislators have realized that mass incarceration is not sustainable over the long haul, and we have to find ways to help them become productive citizens."

"The state is spending so much money on incarceration and it's not really as effective," Hillhouse added. "[At Hay House], you're giving people the tools to succeed and help them realize they need

to take responsibility for themselves and their families."

Newton said the goal of the documentary is to raise public awareness about Hay House. He said he's been surprised at how few people know about the work going on at Hay House.

"The work here is virtually unrecognizable. We prefer to not look at the things that are unsavory," he said. "It's not just poor whites or blacks or Hispanics

caught up in this cycle of recidivism in prison. It can touch anyone."

Hay House Director Dr. Chuck Walsh didn't hesitate to participate in the documentary. "We've been wanting to get the word out for a long time. This gives them a place to live, get treatment they need, medicine, get a job, pay their fines. It gives them at least a fighting chance."

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