

# Faces behind the Figures

Are we safer because they're behind bars?



**Kenneth Carlson, No. 458714**

*Crime: Aggravated Stalking*

*Sentence: 18 mos to 5 years*

*First Possible Release: Aug. 13, 2004*

*Paroled: Dec. 5, 2006*

*Shortly after Kenneth Carlson arrived in prison, a psychologist assessed him and determined that he did not need the Assaultive Offender Program (AOP) because his crime did not involve threats or violence. It wasn't until the parole board reviewed his case for the third time that it decided he needed AOP and denied him parole because he had not completed it.*

Kenneth Carlson graduated from Albion College, earned a law degree at Emory University, married, then worked in corporate management as a labor relations specialist for nine years. However, his battle with alcoholism during much of his adult life ultimately led to the break-up of his marriage, other failed relationships, and the loss of his job and his law career.

In November 2002, when he was 51, Carlson was living in Leelanau County. When it appeared he was unwilling or unable to stop his binge drinking, his girlfriend attempted to end their year-long relationship. Carlson continued phoning her day and night and entered her home on a couple of occasions while she was at work. She obtained a personal protection order (PPO) which forbade him from contacting her.

Seven weeks later, Carlson left a series of messages on his ex-girlfriend's answering machine, in an effort to re-establish the relationship. He was arrested and pled guilty to aggravated stalking. The investigator initially recommended probation for Carlson. However, since he had two misdemeanor domestic battery convictions and several PPO violations in Illinois in the late 90's, and had moved to Michigan while on probation for those offenses, the judge imposed a prison sentence of 18 months to 5 years.

The prison reception center recommended substance abuse treatment for Carlson and screening for the Assaultive Offender Program (AOP). In September 2003, a prison psychologist found that Carlson's crime involved no violence or threat of violence. He determined that Carlson's main issues were relationship dependency, a weak self-concept and heavy alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism. He wrote that involvement in AOP "would not be efficacious," and recommended Alcoholics Anonymous. Carlson relied on this professional assessment. He participated regularly in substance abuse programming and did not attempt to enter AOP.

Carlson became eligible for parole in August 2004. In March, prior to his first parole interview, Carlson was scored average probability of release on the parole guidelines and the parole board continued him in prison for an additional year. In support of its action, it cited reasons the judge had already used to sentence Carlson to prison instead of probation. The board referred several times to Carlson's alcoholism, but did not mention any need for AOP.



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Because of errors in the scoring of his parole guidelines, which Carlson called to the board's attention in June, the board corrected his score, making him high probability of parole. The board was thus required to reconsider its decision. In November 2004, three months after Carlson's earliest possible release date, the board reviewed his case and re-affirmed his parole denial until August 2005. It used the same past history/nature of crime reasons as before. Again, it did not mention any need for AOP.

In January 2005, the board continued Carlson until August 2006. This time it said Carlson needed to take AOP to gain better insight into his crime.

As a result of the board's denial and at Carlson's request, the psychologist assessed him again, once more determined that Carlson did not need AOP, and sent a copy of his findings to the board. The board responded saying it was unlikely to grant Carlson parole without AOP. The psychologist met with Carlson yet another time but did not change his assessment that Carlson needed substance abuse treatment, not AOP. In total, the psychologist spent more than three hours interviewing Carlson.

Finally, in May 2005, at the request of the board, the chief psychologist made a brief assessment of Carlson and put him on the AOP waiting list. In September 2005, two years after Carlson was initially screened out of AOP and more than a year past his earliest possible release date, Carlson began the program.

The board interviewed Carlson again in April 2006. It deferred its decision until it could review his AOP Termination Report, which was completed in August. Carlson was released on parole on December 5, 2006. He will discharge from his maximum five-year sentence in February 2008.