

# Local Photographer Hopes to Destigmatize Cannabis with New Photo Project

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
January 10 2024 8:33 AM



ALTON - A local photographer is working on a project that aims to destigmatize cannabis use by highlighting prominent cannabis users in the Riverbend community.

By taking photos of business owners, volunteers and other big names in the area while they use cannabis, Taralei Griffin hopes to break the stereotype behind marijuana. Her

work will also promote the Last Prisoner Project, an initiative that pushes for criminal justice reform so no one is imprisoned for possessing or using cannabis.

“People should not be having their lives ruined over this healing plant,” Griffin said. “So that’s kind of my goal. I’m going to be starting this photography project because I feel like there’s such a strange dissonance with the sheer amount of people in this area who do rely on it to get through their day, whether it’s medically or just to unwind in the evenings, but then there’s still so many people who are scared of it and don’t understand. And so I feel like if people saw just how many people, in this area especially, are using cannabis and still contributing to the community...The people out there using cannabis are very important to the community and doing a lot for the community.”

According to the Last Prisoner Project, 15.7 million people have been arrested for marijuana offenses in the past 20 years in the U.S. Griffin hopes her project will shine a light on these people and the prevalence of marijuana use in all communities, including the Riverbend/St. Louis region.

Griffin decided to pursue this project after recognizing she was surrounded by people who were open about cannabis use. She realized that there are still many people beyond her friend group who are judgmental, secretive or hesitant about marijuana. This realization and her research about cannabis arrests spurred her to act.

“The purpose is to kind of help end the stigma,” she explained. “I’ve realized I’ve kind of been in a little bubble. A lot of the people around me are very open about cannabis and very friendly to it. But when I step outside that, when I’m around my aunt and uncle, when I’m around other people, they’re not as . And so through that and just the fact that what the Last Prisoner Project focuses on, all of the people still in prison, all the people still getting arrested even in legal states for just possessing a little bit of this plant, it’s ridiculous.”

Griffin previously worked as a music journalist in Nashville, and she enjoys people-focused photography and storytelling. She aims to tell people’s stories through these photographs.

She will meet with her subjects twice, first to hear about their experiences with cannabis and then to do a photoshoot. While she hopes to highlight important people in the community, she noted that she has several ideas to keep her subjects anonymous if requested.

Her final photos will be displayed on April 20, 2024, at the Conservatory in Alton. If you are interested in learning more about Griffin's project, or if you want to volunteer as a photography subject, you can contact her at [fairyherbmother@gmail.com](mailto:fairyherbmother@gmail.com)

“This is important to me, especially because my goal is to keep expanding with what I'm doing for cannabis education and media and everything,” Griffin added. “And I think it's important to continue working to end the stigma and promote things like the Last Prisoner Project. Make sure that while we utilize and enjoy this plant, that we aren't forgetting all of the changes that need to be made for all the people who have been affected by this.”

For more information about the Last Prisoner Project, [visit LastPrisonerProject.org](https://www.LastPrisonerProject.org).