

5TH ANNUAL GREATER HARTFORD REENTRY EMPLOYMENT AND RESOURCE FAIR

On Thursday, September 17th, 2015, the Fifth Annual Greater Hartford Reentry Employment and Resource Fair was held at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Hartford. The fair, part of a collaboration between Chrysalis Center, Inc., and the Greater Hartford Reentry Council, was created to provide an incredible opportunity for Connecticut's formerly incarcerated men and women to obtain employment in a number of industries. This year's fair hosted over forty vendors, along with addresses from two guest speakers.

The fair began with welcome remarks by Robert Michalman, Program Manager for Chrysalis Center, Inc. Mr. Michalman presented the event and cited recent data showing the social and fiscal importance of helping individuals obtain gainful employment when they return to their communities.



Scott Semple, Commissioner of the State of Connecticut Department of Correction, spoke first of his passion for and belief in reentry. Commissioner Semple also gave some insight into his work alongside Governor Dannel P. Malloy in supporting the highly publicized "Second Chance Society" bill, which was passed in July 2015. The Second Chance bill, a package of criminal justice initiatives, focuses especially on helping nonviolent offenders successfully reenter their communities after incarceration. Following Commissioner Semple, Lester Fitzgerald, owner of It's a Gee Thang, a barber shop, hair salon, and full service spa located in Hartford's North End, spoke about his history of teaching, training, and employing a number of individuals upon their reentry from incarceration. He expressed his interest in continuing to lend a hand to people returning to their communities, and encouraged employment seekers to visit him during the fair.

Dozens of employers and resource organizations were present during the fair, including the City of Hartford, the Connecticut Convention Center, Bank of America, and the Connecticut Department of Labor. For three hours, attendees, all formerly incarcerated men and women, strolled through the fair, speaking with vendors, networking, handing out resumes, and discussing employment opportunities. Several attendees were interviewed during the fair, hired, and given start dates. Data will be gathered regarding interviews and jobs secured, with more information to follow.

Chrysalis Center, Inc. collected surveys and compiled a variety of demographical data from attendees for use in the coordination and planning of future events. Surveys completed by participants were very positive with many attendees emphasizing their appreciation that the event was held for them.

Community Solutions, Inc. was a co-sponsor of the event, and thanks to its fellow co-sponsors: the Chrysalis Center, Inc., Community Partners in Action, STRIDE, and the State of Connecticut Department of Correction, for their contributions and support.

Submitted by Andrew Serrano
Community Solutions, Inc.



BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE

CHANGE FOR A BETTER LIFE



I came to the second Call-In held by Project Longevity. I had been living on my own as a single mother in the projects since I was 18 because I couldn't stand living with my mom. I was what they consider a "messenger" because I was good on all sides of the city but tied in with all the wrong people. I started working with Project Longevity after the second Call-In. My daughter and I received turkey and food for Thanksgiving and we attended their Christmas events where my daughter got Christmas presents, but I got pulled back into the street life after a short time. Being with all the wrong guys and back in the streets, I realized I needed the help and came back to Project Longevity.

They began working with me again as if I'd never left them. With Project Longevity's help, I've been working two jobs and recently moved into my own apartment away from the housing projects for the first time. I'm living in a suburban neighborhood with a yard for my daughter and she is starting a new school year in a good school district. I began my change for my daughter, and Project Longevity has given her and me the chance at a better life. It was hard for me to trust Project Longevity because of my past experiences, but I learned that these people actually are here to help and do what they say they are going to do. I can't say where I would have been otherwise, but Project Longevity's ongoing support has kept me motivated to stay on the right path.— Jen

“If you don't like something, change it.
If you can't change it, change your attitude.”

—Maya Angelou



CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

CT REENTRY VOICES

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BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE



BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE CELEBRATES 100TH MEETING

The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative celebrated their 100th consecutive meeting on September 17th at Genesis Church in Bridgeport. The meeting featured special guest speaker Glenn E. Martin, founder of JustLeadershipUSA, a national advocacy organization dedicated to cutting the US correctional population in half by 2030. Mr. Martin is a national leader and criminal justice reform advocate who spent six years in the New York State prison system. His presentation focused on empowering people to drive policy reform. The meeting ended with a Q & A session with Mr. Martin and a panel discussion.

The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative is Connecticut's longest continuously running reentry forum. We congratulate co-chair, Dan Braccio, Director of the CO-OP Center Program at The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, for his tireless effort and dedication to this collaborative over the years.

The CT Statewide Reentry Collaborative is made up of the roundtables from Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Windham County and Southeastern CT. These reentry roundtables have been working for the past several years to identify and address needs and gaps in services for individuals returning home from incarceration. Each roundtable is a collaboration of state and local organizations working together to provide resources and create opportunities to make our communities safer.

Submitted by Jen Eddy, STRIDE Program



This poem was written for the P.R.I.D.E. Program by four time number one best selling author, poet, peace activist, and father,
Richard M. Knittle, Jr.

Wisdom comes
by learning from
the mistakes
We make
In our life
Pride is knowing
that we worked
real hard
and
did our very
best through
heartache, mistakes
and strife
we all have a place
We came from
no two
lives are ever
the same
we must take
control of
Ourselves
so there is
No one else
to blame
We all deserve
a second chance
no matter
what it is for
so take Pride
in yourself
for getting
Through
The storm.

Believe in yourself even when
nobody else does and never
give up on what you believe in
Good Luck and God Bless

GREATER HARTFORD REENTRY COUNCIL (GHREC)

HAVING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND SUPPORT

I'm Tracy and this is my re-entry experience after addiction and incarceration. A felony feels like a life sentence but my new attitude is the crime I committed doesn't define me and is not an accurate representation of my character since making major positive changes in my life. I was in prison for 3 months then sentenced to a 6-month rehab program. I was very lucky that the judge even considered granting me a program; they usually don't for charges like mine. I was determined to make the most of my second chance; my reentry was up to me. I took notes in my IOP, learned about myself, and practiced the CBT that was taught to me. I attended recovery meetings, seminars, and workshops. I met people like myself, and people that wanted to help. A Retention Specialist at CT Works helped me with my resume and in a week I had a job offer. I followed the program rules and saved money for an apartment. Once on my own I took advantage of any and all programs offered to me. I'm not saying it was easy to get on my feet, far from it. I was denied many things because of my record, but with determination and persistence it is possible to find ones that will take a chance. Two years after prison, I'm still employed, in a decent apartment, and my marriage has improved. I see my daughter every weekend, attend college, and I volunteer. There's still a lot of work to be done, but I have goals now and feel like I'm a productive citizen. I plan on voting, getting off methadone, regaining custody, having a baby, graduating, fixing my credit, and applying for a pardon to put this nightmare behind me. Years ago I would have labeled these things impossible, but the thing about goals is, once you start, it's a snowball effect giving you confidence to keep working. Reentry is possible for anyone with confidence, persistence, and determination. I needed encouragement from others and I'm grateful to those I met on my journey. They inspire me to be like them and help others, so this story is the beginning of my plan to do that. — Tracy

Create S.M.A.R.T. Goals

NEW HAVEN REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

GOOD NEWS FOR NEW HAVEN

New Haven Fresh Start was the recipient of a DOJ/Second Chance Act grant (\$1million over 3 years) in conjunction with PROJECT MORE, Community Action Agency, and Easter Seals/Goodwill to implement an unprecedented collaborative approach to reentry. Also, the City of New Haven partnered with the Workplace in Bridgeport and was awarded a federal DOL grant, and will collaborate on a joint job readiness program to assist 170 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women, 85 in each city. In addition, New Haven's Workforce Alliance in partnership with the City was awarded a grant from DOL to open an American Job Center (scheduled to open early 2016) at Whalley Avenue Correctional Center. In October, Family Reentry, Inc. opened its DANA House on Henry Street in New Haven with a DOC contract to serve up to 15 men with mental health/substance abuse issues. Yale's School of Medicine was awarded \$1.5 million to study and treat up to 300 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women with substance abuse/mental health issues. Finally, Yale Law School will officially open its Reentry Clinic in conjunction with New Haven Legal Assistance beginning in January 2016.

Submitted by Clifton Graves, Fresh Start



WINDHAM COUNTY REENTRY COUNCIL

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Brooklyn Correctional Institution celebrated National Recovery Month in September by hosting events to enhance awareness and take action down the road of recovery. The month-long celebration included an inmate poetry jam where the sounds and beats of recovery ran rampant with inspiring rhymes. A previous offender also made an appearance to share with current inmates the importance of seeking help and working towards goals. Daryl M. shared with the facility about his own personal struggles to find and maintain his recovery while incarcerated and after release. Now Daryl is a leading example of how you can accomplish anything you set your mind to no matter how many obstacles you face, as well as building a successful career and family life. At the end of the month, Brooklyn Correctional Institution hosted a Resource Fair. Local agencies and providers distributed information and applications for eager inmates to better prepare them for release. The Resource Fair proved to be a great connecting point for inmates to gain knowledge on available services to help them maintain their health and recovery after release.

Submitted by Kendra Collins, Brooklyn Correctional Institution

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE



CT REENTRY VOICES interviewed Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple on his visit to the prison system in Germany.

CT REENTRY VOICES: You must have prepped for your visit, but were your first impressions of the prison system different from what you knew before going over? What stood out?

Commissioner Semple: Yes, I did a lot of research prior to my visit to include published documents from the VERA Institute and a YouTube video presented by folks who made a similar trip about one year prior to my visit. My overall impressions were consistent with what many call the European Model. What stood out most for me was the overall environment. There was definitely a different vibe in the prisons that we visited. It was quiet, organized and there appeared to be a certain level of dignity between the staff and inmate population.

CT REENTRY VOICES: Share your perception of the “culture” of the prison system there. What are the differences between your responsibilities as Commissioner and your counterpart in Germany?

Commissioner Semple: There is a culture of mutual respect and commitment to wellness. The best example I can describe was related to a simple question that was posed. The contingent asked about the rate of incidents at a facility that was the equivalent of a level four, maximum security environment here in the United States. For calendar year 2014 there were zero incidents at this particular facility. That means the staff and inmates were exposed to virtually no trauma. Although the Connecticut system boasts pretty low incident rates, zero is an attractive number. We met two administrators who oversee regions within the German system, which is operated by our equivalent of a federal government system. Their Wardens are referred to as Governors. In comparison, the roles and responsibilities of these positions appeared consistent with the systems in the United States.

CT REENTRY VOICES: You have mentioned that there are only 4,000 inmates in the prison system in the city you visited. Does that smaller number by itself make the jobs of corrections staff easier/more effective?

Commissioner Semple: The city that you are describing is Berlin. As previously described, this city is one of several dedicated regions within Germany. The census in Berlin was consistent with the census in the State of Connecticut (approximately 3.3 million). As you indicated, Berlin incarcerates about 4,000 inmates. The incarcerated census in Connecticut is four times greater (approximately 16,000). I do not think that a reduced population will make the job of a correctional professional easier. Fostering law abiding behavior is an immense and complicated endeavor. As much as the Department of Correction along with our partners can, it will introduce evidence based practices that we know have positive outcomes. It will ultimately always require self-accountability and commitment from the offender. Both systems experience failure, but that does not mean that we give up trying or operate in a manner that does not foster hope. A reduced population should allow us to be more effective provided the appropriate resources are allocated accordingly.

CT REENTRY VOICES: What kind (s) of training do corrections staff undergo that is different from someone in corrections in CT?

Commissioner Semple: This is an interesting question. In Germany you are required to have an I.Q. of 100 or above. It is apparent that the training is very demanding and requires two years of commitment. I do not recall the specific completion rate, but I do know that most do not make it through their academy. We watched a video of one of the candidates undergoing an interview type test. He was subjected to a scenario and was then required to go before a review board. It was intense and you could sense the anxiety that this employee candidate was up against. He passed, but made several mistakes that he had to appropriately respond to; otherwise it was a “call it a career moment.”

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER CONTINUED

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

CT REENTRY VOICES: Assuming that the needs of German inmates are not vastly different from U.S. inmates upon release, how successful is the German system in reducing recidivism and preparing inmates for their reintegration back into their communities.

Commissioner Semple: Germany does not rely on recidivism rates like we do here in the United States. This question was posed during our visit and they did not have any data to present. However, it is clear that rates are no doubt much lower than ours. Incarceration in Germany is used as a last resort. Sentences for equivalent crimes are significantly less. Very seldom are there any gun related crimes. Most inmates returning to the community have employment and higher education opportunities that occur in the community during their incarceration. Yes, at some of their facilities they can work and go to work and/or school in the community. These are referred to as "open facilities". Interesting enough, our recently opened Reintegration Unit at Cybulski is moving in the same direction. In addition, the rate of pay is more aligned to what I perceived as a sustainable income. Medical and higher education services are provided by the government to all citizens.

CT REENTRY VOICES: How do the communities play a role in reentry in Germany?

Commissioner Semple: The stigma of incarceration did not seem as apparent in Germany. My general sense is the community is much more interested in formerly incarcerated people moving on with their lives. I did not broach this topic with any of the citizenry, but this is what was shared with us and I have no reason to believe otherwise. There were enough variables to consider that support this notion.

CT REENTRY VOICES: What is the one thing that you witnessed on your trip that you would like to incorporate into the CT prison system (if there were no financial/legislative barriers)?

Commissioner Semple: We are exploring the potential to put more emphasis on what I consider to be our most vulnerable population as it relates to recidivism. This population represents offenders within the age range of 18 to 25. We visited a facility that was designed specifically for this population. The milieu for this environment put heavy emphasis on brain development. People within this age range have a tendency to be more physically impulsive and it is believed that this exists because the brain is not fully developed and is limited in reasoning. "Good" in Connecticut means we begin to introduce programming and curriculum to this population. "Great" means that as our population declines, we will dedicate infrastructure (housing units and/or a facility) to mimic certain aspects of the environment I observed. I am told that this endeavor would be a first in the United States. With implementation we can view recidivism on two fronts. One is the existing vast majority of the overall population (over 90%) that will re-enter society due to sentence eligibility and is represented in our current recidivism rates. The other is this age group, which we know represents a much higher rate of return to incarceration. Positive outcomes will naturally impact the recidivism rates in Connecticut. Most importantly, by targeting the more vulnerable in a more comprehensive manner we present the possibility of having a generational impact.

Commissioner Semple: In closing, I would like to acknowledge Governor Malloy who took the time out of his busy schedule to traverse through the German Prison system with me. To his credit, he is very knowledgeable about criminal justice matters and is aware and supports my rant on what I think we can do in Connecticut. Also, I would also like to thank the VERA Institute and John Jay College who sponsored this event and allowed for various representatives around the country to experience a European system. The television show 60 Minutes will feature this trip in an upcoming segment in the near future.

CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

BRIDGEPORT

Dan Braccio, danbraccio@ccgb.org
 Bridgeport Parole Office
 1052 North Avenue, Bridgeport, CT
 3rd Thursday
 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

GREATER HARTFORD

Sue Gunderman, sgunderman@qvcc.edu & Aileen O'Connor, aoconnor@csimail.org
 CT Nonprofits
 75 Charter Oak Avenue, Bldg. 1, Hartford, CT
 1st Thursday
 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

NEW HAVEN

Clifton Graves
 NHFreshStart1@newhavenct.net
 Church on the Rock
 95 Hamilton Street, New Haven, CT
 3rd Tuesday
 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

SOUTHEASTERN CT

Kia Baird, kbaird@csimail.org
 Norwich American Job Center
 113 Salem Tnpk., Norwich, CT
 3rd Friday
 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

WINDHAM COUNTY

Julie Scrapchansky, jscrapchansky@qvcc.edu
 Quinebaug Valley Community College
 742 Upper Maple Street, Danielson, CT
 4th Friday
 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.



If you would like more information or would like to add an article for our next newsletter, please contact Sue Gunderman at sgunderman@qvcc.edu or (860) 932-4090.