

## BRIDGEPORT REENTRY RESOURCE CENTER



*Left to Right: Bridgeport City Councilman, Anthony Paoletto; DOC Deputy Commissioner Cheryl Cepelak; Bridgeport Mayor Joseph Ganim; U.S. Senator Chris Murphy; Jay Brothers' sons, daughter, and wife, Jen; John Hamilton, CEO, Recovery Network of Programs, cut the ribbon on the new Jay Brothers' Unified Resource Center in Bridgeport.*

Bridgeport recently celebrated the opening of a unique reentry resource. The Jay Brothers' Unified Resource Center at 480 Bond St. had its Grand Opening on Thursday, October 13. More than 200 people attended including U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, Bridgeport Mayor Joseph Ganim, CT State Senator Ed Gomes (Bridgeport), and DOC Deputy Commissioner Cheryl Cepelak.

The genesis for this new center began with a request from a dying cancer patient. Jay Brothers, a 53 year old veteran and recovering addict, who, after achieving his first year of sobriety in 1988, dedicated his life to helping others who were facing the same battle he had so recently won. He pursued a notable career as a substance abuse counselor saving others as he had been saved and worked in a number of community and state agencies finally ending up at the Center for Change of New Haven.

Jay was diagnosed with brain cancer in March 2015 and succumbed to the disease in November of last year. Having developed a close personal relationship with John Hamilton, President/CEO of Recovery Network of Programs (RNP), Jay asked John to establish a community center where multiple services could be accessed. John decided to re-purpose a building that RNP had outgrown for its out-patient programming and in April 2016 offered the building rent-free to community reentry agencies that were looking for an outreach opportunity. The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative responded quickly and created a core of services for the center.

Now, a month after the Centers' soft opening in September, the new Center is providing a host of reentry services including career resources, vocational training, educational and literacy services, recovery coaching services and peer mentoring, health and holistic wellness services, and licensed behavioral health services including individual, group and family outpatient treatment; intensive outpatient treatment care; case management, and crisis intervention.

At the Grand Opening, Bridgeport Mayor Ganim said, "Bridgeport is a second chance city and that is why we welcome this amazing center to our community to help anyone who may have made a mistake in their past put their careers and lives back together." - **Dan Braccio, Career Resources**

## ROAD TO SUCCESS

I am 27 years old and in 2011 I was convicted of a felony. Due to that conviction for more than three years I could not find employment. During this period, I had a lot of time to reflect on different jobs I had in the past and my present difficulties with me finding employment. I felt more and more as if I should put my livelihood in my own hands, but didn't know how to go about it. I was recom-



mended to a program called Project Longevity. This program assists people re-entering society with certain necessities needed to survive such as public transportation, housing, job leads, etc. Through Project Longevity I was recommended to the P.R.I.D.E. program run and taught by Barry Diamond. This is a class for people re-entering society teaching them how to start their own business. This class taught and inspired me a lot. The main thing I took from it is to think out of the box and that what you think is impossible is really simple as long as you take little steps first and really commit. Since I graduated the P.R.I.D.E. Program, I have started my own gourmet Jamaican patty business. I have an industrial kitchen that is in a church that I work out of. I've been building my business plan while training to become a graduate trainer for the new P.R.I.D.E. Program classes coming up. Everything has been moving in the right direction. I would like to thank these programs as I can actually say these people have changed my life. In closing, I would like to thank Barry and the people of Project Longevity and say that second chances are definitely needed to be saved in our communities. I am proud to say I am a survivor and success story.— **Christopher W.**

## SHASHA SEMINAR FOR HUMAN CONCERNS

On October 14-15 the Wesleyan University [Center for Prison Education](#) welcomed over 150 alumni, faculty, students and friends to campus for this year's annual Shasha Seminar for Human Concerns, centered on the topic [The Role of the University in the Era of Mass Incarceration](#).

The seminar opened with a keynote address by Michael Romano of the [Justice Advocacy Project](#) at Stanford Law. Mr. Romano outlined the scope of the mass incarceration crisis in America, home to 5% of the world's total population while housing 25% of its prisoners. He then shared his pioneering work in California, winning the release of those sentenced to life for non-violent crimes under "Three Strikes" laws and supporting their re-entry.

At dinner, Wesleyan President Roth [addressed the crowd](#), saying 'it is crucial for the health of our educational institution that we engage this most pressing civil rights issue of our times.' This was followed by several short talks, including one given by CT Under-Secretary for Criminal Justice Mike Lawlor.

The seminar featured panels, Q&A sessions, short talks and an art exhibition from the [Community Partners in Action Prison Arts Program](#). Twenty experts including Greg Berman of the [Center for Court Innovation](#), Vivian Nixon of the [College and Community Fellowship](#), DOC Commissioner Scott Semple and formerly incarcerated individuals covered topics including mass incarceration and the undergraduate experience, academic scholarship's impact on public policy, the importance of re-entry work, higher education's troubled history with racial oppression, the importance of public and private partnerships, and the impact of college-in-prison programs.

The weekend closed with a powerful talk by noted poet and author [Reginald Dwayne Betts](#). He addressed his own experiences incarcerated as a youth, the power of education, and how to move society forward. — **Noah Barth, Wesleyan, Program Manager, Center for Prison Education**

## RIISING ABOVE THE DARKEST OF CLOUDS



Left to right: Linda Kelly President of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Workforce Star Daniel Rivera, American Job Center's Mark Allen and Workforce Star, Gus Marks-Hamilton.

### Meet the 2016 Workforce Stars

*Both winners were nominated by Mark Allen - Free to Succeed Retention Specialist at the American Job Center*

**Daniel Rivera** has come a long way. He exemplifies what second chances are all about. You don't get a 30-year prison sentence for petty crimes – the dark cloud Daniel has had to rise above is perhaps one of the hardest feats imaginable. Yet, Daniel, with the help of his loving family, and the supports offered through programs within the corrections system, the American Job Center and Jobs Funnel is doing well today, working, living, loving.

It takes great courage and persistence to stay the right course, and Daniel has capitalized on every opportunity afforded to him. From using the Online Resource Room at the American Job Center to Masonry and Construction training and certifications at the Jobs Funnel, to the Free to Succeed retention program he is now in, Daniel has recently been awarded his Certificate of Employability from the CT Board of Pardons and Parole. He continues to expand his dreams of being a better citizen in our community and influence in his family as a son, brother, husband, dad and grandfather. He is a positive role model, coach and teacher to young people and others in the community, and he has been employed full time since being released from incarceration.

Mark Allen, Free to Succeed Retention Specialist at the American Job Center nominated Daniel as a 2016 Workforce Star, and has known this individual since he received counseling services while incarcerated. Mark shares, *"What I found remarkable and endearing regarding Mr. Rivera's story was the evolution and his ability to transform these negative situations into ones of compassion, love and the true meaning of life, family, and being a positive member in society."* He is now providing for his family and has an apartment, car and a promising future. At the Workforce Stars event, Daniel stated he had never been "honored" before in front of a room of people. This is this first of many such occasions for Daniel in the years ahead.

**Gus Marks-Hamilton** is an independent, self-directed young man who was able to turn a negative circumstance into a positive and productive life for his family and for himself. He is a proven survivor, intelligent, well read and well spoken, resourceful, determined and compassionate. In his lifetime, he has made some poor choices that introduced him to the state corrections system.

With the assistance of a program within Corrections, and assistance on the outside at the American Job Center, within a short period after his release from corrections, he obtained quality employment, first as a Sandwich Artist at Subway and later as a Store Manager. This opened the doors for housing, financial stability and means to better take care of his family and himself. It is with the same determination that he is pursuing his Master's Degree in Social Work with the UConn. Though his background could have been a barrier to educational and employment opportunities, he was able to get his job and get accepted into the MSW program.

Gus has taken this second chance, doing the right thing in life by rebuilding his family relations and trust, finding gainful employment, and pursuing educational opportunities. But he has not stopped there. Gus wants to forget the negative aspects of the past, and wants to continue to assist other former offenders with their unique struggles with transitioning back in society. In his role as a Store Manager, he was able to employ and assist other former offenders. One particular individual he hired later became the Store Manager for another Subway.

Gus takes pride in his advocacy and public speaking regarding the Second Chance Society. He has been asked to speak out on issues and concerns facing former offenders, and was instrumental in getting the Ban the Box (Bill 52-37) Legislation passed.

The *Free to Succeed* program is funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving through the Beatrice Fox Auerbach Foundation Fund and by the US Department of Labor. United Bank Foundation was the Champion Sponsor of the 2016 Workforce Stars event.— **Mark Allen, Free to Succeed Program**

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## NOTHING PREPARES YOU



I was the golden ticket. I wasn't given one. I just was it. No matter what I wanted to do, I did. I remember one time a friend asked me if I was worried about an upcoming new job. I told him no...everything works out for me. No need to stress. Then I got arrested. Then I went to jail. There was a new level of stress, a new level of worry I had never experienced before. I spent 20 months in the custody of the state of Connecticut. I stressed, I worried, I cried. Nothing really prepares you for going to jail. But I found my way through it. I worked as a tutor in every facility in which I resided. I took classes, attended programs...did everything I could to make use of my time. Then they released me. Nothing prepares you for going to jail. Nothing prepares you for the day you leave.

I worry now. I stress more than I ever have. I breathe in fresh air, but I still feel the anxiety of past mistakes. I have a great job, a great apartment. I have made my way back into society and even back to the profession I had once before. But the stress is there. That fear of losing everything again always creeps back in. I push forward. How does one get rid of it? How can you just move on? To be honest, I don't know. But I keep moving. I stay active as much as possible. Staying focused on bettering myself is how I get through each day. There are no more golden tickets. Everything is earned now.

Nothing prepares you for the day you leave jail... and nothing prepares you for living your life afterwards.— **John T.**



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## TIPS TO SURVIVE PROBATION



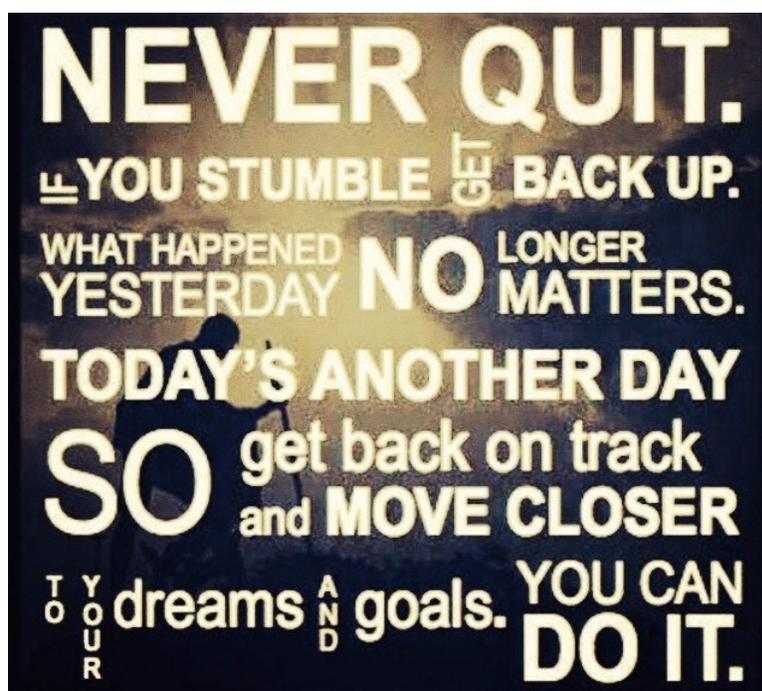
While I was inside, inmate after inmate would come up to me and tell me how probation “was a setup.” They would tell tales about how they were in and out of jail on probation violations, and how the same stuff happened to everyone they knew. After a while you wonder, “maybe it is a setup.” Don’t let that idea get into your head. It is not easy, it can be overwhelming, especially depending on your officer. But here are a few tips to help guide you along.

**Don’t break the rules:** I know this sounds like an easy one, but to be honest, it is really easy to violate yourself by doing something you’re not supposed to. There are a ton of rules to follow. You can’t go here, don’t drink this, don’t talk to these people. Simply said... don’t do it. No beer is worth the possibility of doing more time. And by the way, if it is against the law for everyone, it is especially against the law for you.

**Participate in group:** If you are required to go to a class or a program, then make sure you participate. You are there for an hour or more every week, you might as well talk during that time. It shows the therapists and your officer that you care about your rehabilitation... that you are not someone they need to worry about. Show them your mistake is simply that, a mistake and that you have learned from it.

**Tell your officer everything:** When you meet them, always have something to say. They will ask you how it’s going, about your job. Tell them. If you are having trouble finding a job, make sure they know you are looking. If work is going well, tell them. You are not friends by any stretch of the imagination... but if you can show them you are human, not some monster on their case load, they are more likely to relax the reins a bit. Once that happens, doors begin to open, rules begin to be lifted, and the real world seems a bit more real.

Now these are tips not rules, just things I have been able to use to my advantage as I maneuver my way through the system. Probation is stressful. Probation can be overwhelming. But if you walk the straight path, probation is not a setup.— **John T.**



## TIPS ON FINDING A JOB



One of the toughest, and most stressful parts of life once you leave jail, is finding a job. It is already hard to land a new gig in the first place, but having a criminal record is like playing baseball with only 6 players on the field. But let me tell you from experience... it can be done. Here are some tips that I found useful.

**Make finding a job... your job:** Within a week of getting out of prison I began my search for a job. I didn't have a computer at home, so I went to the public library and used theirs. I was there for at least four hours every day. When I say every day, I mean... I missed Christmas and New Years Day. If the library was open, I was there searching the web for a job. It was tiring, it was frustrating, but it got me out of the house, and it gave my day purpose. You can't find a job if you don't look.

**Use help:** There are a lot of resources out there for finding work. Use them. Don't mope around saying it is too hard to find a job, that nobody wants to help or hire you. That is not true. Whether it be a group like Goodwill or Capital Workforce Partners, there are companies and organizations out there who want nothing more than to help find you a job. And they will do it for free. They have classes, programs, and coaches who will be by your side through the entire process. I still use them.

**Be Humble:** Listen, I don't know what you did before you went away. Maybe you were a doctor, maybe you were in business... right now... you are flipping burgers. My first job out was working in a warehouse running around on a pallet jack picking up food and shipping it out. Nothing wrong with that. Good, honest work. But not what I studied in school. When they say you are starting out, the key word to that statement is "starting." Be humble. Take what you can get. Start there... then keep looking. No job is forever as long as you stay focused and hungry.

It isn't easy to find a job once you are released from the state's custody. But if you work at it... just like everything else in life, it is achievable.— **John T.**



CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

BRIDGEPORT

Dan Braccio, braccio@careerresources.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 BRITAIN

Linda Lentini, llentini@advocacyunlimited.org  
 Joan Masot, jmasot@advocacyunlimited.org  
 114 West Main Street  
 New Britain, CT  
 2nd Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

NEW HAVEN

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

SOUTHEASTERN CT

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

WATERBURY

Beth Hines, bhines@cpa-ct.org  
 Wellmore  
 402 East Main Street, Waterbury, CT  
 1st Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.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 submit an article for our next newsletter, please contact Sue Gunderman at sgunderman@qvcc.edu or (860) 932-4090.

