

CELEBRATING SUCCESS



The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative hosted its 4th Annual Bridgeport Reentry Award Ceremony on Friday, March 27 at Housatonic Community College. Over 250 people attended the celebration which recognized more than 80 award recipients in categories including Outstanding Student, Personal Achievement, and Professionals, Advocates, Community Partners, and Business Partners of the Year. Distinguished guests who presented these awards included State Senators Tony Hwang (R-Fairfield) and Ed Gomes (WFP –Bridgeport); Dr. Sandy Martin, CT Innovation Center; Peter Gioia, CT Business and Industry Association; and Charles Grady, Project Longevity Bridgeport.

Governor Dannel Malloy attended the event and shared his thoughts with the audience about creating a Second Chance Society in CT which will recognize that redemption for formerly incarcerated people is not only possible but necessary if the state is to move forward. He talked about the tremendous burden that incarcerating non-violent drug offenders places on the state financially and on the communities and neighborhoods where they live. He encouraged employers to provide employment opportunities and legislators to pass “smart on crime” legislation.

One of the highlights of the event was the presentation of the first Matthew Semple Memorial Scholarship Award. This award was established through the efforts of Scott Wilderman, President/CEO of Career Resources, Inc., to honor the young life of Matthew Semple, son of DOC Commissioner Scott Semple and his wife, Christa, who passed away at the beginning of this year after a courageous battle with cancer. The initial scholarship funding was generously provided through the efforts of Joseph Carbone, President/CEO of The WorkPlace, Inc. Angel Reyes, a student in the DARC program at Gateway CC, received this scholarship award and in a moving acceptance speech said, “To the Semple family, who without you this would not be possible, I will carry your son’s memory with honor.” Mr. Reyes also received additional recognition through a generous contribution from Mrs. Lucy Baney, President of Access Technologies Group, for financial help with books and transportation for his college courses.

This year’s Urdang-Torres Community Impact Award was presented not to one person but to a book representing a collaboration of many people. *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream*, published last Fall, has already had an impact in helping the ordinary citizen in CT grasp the financial and collateral costs of a decades-old race to incarcerate. The book as Brian Moran, the book’s editor, said seeks to educate all sectors of society about effective solutions to the challenges that hyper-incarceration has created.

In his closing remarks, Commissioner Semple thanked all those who were involved in the direct work or support of reentry around the state and said that he is looking to strengthen those partnerships with the Department of Correction to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and make Connecticut a model state for effective corrections programming.

It was, indeed, a wonderful evening of celebrating success within the reentry community! Congratulations to all those who were recognized, and thanks to all those who supported this effort!



BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE

ROAD TO REDEMPTION

My name is **Byron B.** and I am a released felon on the road to redemption. What I did to end up in jail is not important. What is important is the thought process that occurred while being there. I used my time in jail to reflect, learn and change. Missing my daughter's first Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year is the main reason for my turn around. My kids mean the world to me and picturing them without me ripped me apart.



Upon release I was motivated to get my life together. A few months later I attended the "Call In" where I met Charles Grady, from Project Longevity. After he explained what he was trying to do in the city of Bridgeport and for me, I was all ears. Project Longevity provides help to those that want it. They helped me with various opportunities. The best was helping me get my own apartment and my job at Wade's Dairy. Welding is what I intend to pursue as a career and Project Longevity is helping me to get there. I don't regret my past because it made me the man I am now.

"They say it's not about how you start but how you finish, but my two questions are WHO are they? and WHAT if I'm not finished just yet!"

I'm happy, at peace, and *free*. Everyday is a new day and an opportunity to change myself and those around me. So I say to others, embrace your past but look forward to the future for it can make or break you. Only you can make the choice. You can't become the person you want to be by staying the person you are.

REENTRY SURVIVOR'S SUCCESS STORIES

We all know that the reentry process will work better with more job opportunities and more reentry success stories. There are employers who look for and want to hire motivated individuals. Successful reentry and the advocacy it creates, will stimulate more success stories. Knowing and working with individuals who have successfully re-entered and are contributing to society will create a major change in attitudes on the inside and the outside, on both sides of the razor wire. We have the opportunity to promote this change through a new initiative, People of the Month Reentry Survivors Success Stories.

We invite individuals (or their families) who have successfully negotiated the reentry process and gained personal satisfaction in this achievement to contribute. We respect your desire for some privacy. We do not need to know the crime, time served or number of incarcerations. Rather, we are interested in the reentry story, success of the reentry and the resources you as an individual utilized in the process, what works and what doesn't work. A success story should be limited to about 500 words. Do not worry about spelling or sentence structure because all stories submitted will be reviewed and corrected as needed. The stories, if accepted, will be published. Stories can be submitted directly on our website or by e-mail to reentrysurvivors@gmail.com.

Your story can make a real difference in changing attitudes, reducing incarceration and recidivism rates, and creating more opportunities for employment and changing lives.



CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

GREATER HARTFORD REENTRY COUNCIL (GHREC)

LIFE'S JOURNEY: SEEKING HOPE

How can I be so lost, why am I so confused?
I'm out in the world the "real" world with no
sense, no clue
I breezed through my teens young wild and free,
but growing up was easy,
The hard part is trying to find me

How can I be so lost, why am I so confused?
I'm out in the world, the "real" world with no
sense, no clue
In this new age we look to the media for growth
and inspiration,
Putting aside who we truly are to follow behind
someone else's imagination,
I want to leave this place, the one that I call home,
But not where my mother lives - the one I made long ago,

I feel like I'm stuck and I'm slowly losing hope
I stare in the mirror but not at myself
I stand there for hours but in my place stands Jane Doe

How can I be so lost, why am I so confused?
I can't control my emotions, my feelings become detached
All that once mattered to me have become things of the past
As life exceeds it's harder to leave behind who I once was and embrace a new me
She is there somewhere but where could she be?
As I escape into the only place I find safe,
I peek into the window of my soul to find my purpose in this world
I don't know where I'm going or how I'm going to get there,
At this moment, this place is somewhere I want to be nowhere near. — Regine V.



Hope CHANGES EVERYTHING

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

I am **Charles K.**, VERY thankful for the STRIVE Experience. The streets and living a life of crime made me forget all my dreams hopes, wants and goals. I went through life day by day high and chasing things that I now see have no value or true meaning. For so many years I stopped thinking that I could have a better life. I stop believing in myself, I stopped trying. I'm no longer that person. I never held a job until now. I have a clear mind allowing me to think and remember what makes me happy, and what I want out of life. I learned that I am not alone in my situation and there are people out there that care and are willing to help me. I learned how to build a resume and cover letter, I learned computer skills. I also learned how to tie a tie and dress for an interview and how to present myself during interviews. I learned about a number of other resources that are out there that I can use to help me in my job search. I learned how to budget my earnings so that I wouldn't have to live from check to check. I learned that it's not too late for me and it's not too late for others like me.

NEW HAVEN REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE



MY JOURNEY

June 23, 2009 I was arrested for illegal possession of an unregistered firearm and possession of narcotics with intent to sell; at the time of my arrest I had (5) five years of special parole hanging over my head; I knew I wasn't getting out any time soon.

I looked at my options either I was going to be a bum, a professional drug dealer or start to work on Blaine. I decided to work on myself. I knew I would need GOD to get through this; so I continued to do the right things for the right reasons and that's all that mattered.

I got involved in anything that dealt with N/A & A/A, cognitive thinking, parenting and vocational education. I started getting involved while still in the county jail and continued throughout my time in prison. I took advantage of every opportunity D.O.C. had to offer; the T.I.M.E. program, Inside/Out Dad program along with all vocational classes, creative writing and bible study.

I served (5) five years of a (10) ten year sentence then released to The Roger Sherman House in New Haven CT on May 20, 2014. Within the first month I renewed my Class B CDL and the following month I was introduced to the Fresh Start Program. Through them I filled out an application seasonal work for the City of New Haven. I was called in for an interview and hired for Parks and Recreations Dept. as a seasonal caretaker. I worked and went to school at Gateway Community College taking drug and alcohol recovery counselor classes the D.A.R.C. program. The Roger Sherman House placed lots of restrictions on me that I thought were too much but these restrictions were in place to keep me focused, prioritize, slow down and do one thing at a time. I now know how to keep my focus where it should be and I know just what I'm capable of doing.

I worked hard and continued to do the right things for the right reasons and it paid off for me. My direct supervisor job encouraged me to fill out applications for full time employment with the City of New Haven. I did and came across a full time position as a parking enforcement officer. I placed high on the exam and was called for an interview which the went better than I expected. The very next day I was offered a job as a parking enforcement officer. I started working for the City of New Haven on February 17, 2014 making over \$37,000.

Making the choice to change my ways when I first came to prison has prepared me to step into the life I'm living today. I'm still enrolled in school and working on starting a small business of my own within the next year or so. All I can say is that my journey started with making a choice to do right, work hard, trust the LORD, and not be afraid of what will come. Every class, program, and situation I went through while in prison has positioned me and prepared me to live my life today, and the JOURNEY has just started. The best is yet to come.— **Blaine M.**

SOUTHEASTERN CT REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

MESSAGE OF FORGIVENESS & HOPE

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE



My name is **Denise**. I am a 54 year old mother of 4, grandmother of 12. I came from a middle-class family. I came from a great home. My parents made sure my brothers and I had whatever we needed and wanted.

At 15, I met my first husband. At 16, we started partying, started smoking weed and doing trip. That was short-lived. I did not like the feeling. I married at the age of 21, had my first son at 21, left my husband at 22, and that was the beginning of my hell. I was out drinking one night and a friend (I thought was my friend) introduced me to cocaine. That was it. I was off and running. For 20 years I chased that first high.

I thank the Lord every day that my kids have forgiven me. I had my kids doing bad things. I had them stealing. From what I am told, I had one of them selling drugs to make me money so I could keep getting high.

In 1999, I guess something snapped in me. I saw with my own eyes what my son was doing on the corner of a street. It broke my heart. From that night on, I never touched cocaine again. I packed my kids up and moved to Massachusetts, so I have not been an active addict for 15 years.

You would think things would get better. Well, they did not. From that point on, I never touched the drug. But I was doing other really bad things. In 2006, I was sentenced to 4 years in jail, which ended up being the best thing (other than my kids and grandchildren) that ever happened to me. I was sentenced to be locked up for 4 years; I did 3 ½ years. I had a lot of time to think and work on myself. While in jail I got saved: I found the Lord. He showed me how to live life in a different way.

While incarcerated, I set goals for my life. I have achieved 99% of them. I was working 80 hours a week, two full-time jobs. I learned how to save money. My kids have forgiven me, which I thank God for every day. Most importantly, I love myself nowadays. I am a manager at McDonalds. Life is great! My final goal is to help someone to let people know you are never too old to change. You *can* teach an old dog new tricks. I am proof of it.



WINDHAM COUNTY REENTRY COUNCIL

PATH TO SUCCESS



The Path to Success is Paved With Mistakes

At a young age I went down a very rocky road but spent the last four years smoothly paving it piece by piece. Surprisingly my story starts very normal. I grew up with a beautiful family, lots of friends and maintained good grades. However like many teens I detoured off my path to success once entering high school. The exciting new life of boys, booze and bonfires began to take over, and soon my very innocent life took a turn for the worst.

At 19 I finished high school and began preparing to attend UCONN College. Yet sadly, a few months after graduating I decided to go to a party my friends at my friend's home. A normal weekend event. I assumed that because I wasn't running the streets, dabbling in drugs and because I had a plan, that I was doing good but in actuality I was blindly steering my life down a dark path that I did not recognize until I crashed. At this age I carried around the naive thought that I was invincible.

As I drank, this child-like mind set only strengthened, and tragically I made the terrible decision to get behind the wheel and drive two of my friends to another party. We barely made it a mile before the alcohol conquered me and I passed out. This resulted in me taking the life of one friend and severely hurting the other. Now rather than spending four years at UCONN I received the same amount at York Correctional Institution. I spent this time focusing on how and why I got where I was and began doing all that I could to change the direction of my life.

While incarcerated I fought to get into two colleges were I maintained a 4.0 GPA, I worked for Habitat for Humanity, trained NEADS dogs for the disabled and spoke to at-risk teenagers about my crime in order to give back. But most importantly I spent years grasping the true importance of life and replaced booze and boys with family, hard work and simplicity. I try to teach my story to anyone and everyone who will listen in the hopes that they will not make the same choices I did. Now, I dedicate my life to my friends who I took so much from that day.

So I absolutely relate to the quote, "*The path to success is paved with failure.*" I believe every journey has a destined purpose and mine was given to me for some profound reason. This being said I use my past to motivate me instead of letting it define me. I get up everyday and I am focused on accomplishments such as finishing college, working with MADD, giving my all at my minimum wage job and living everyday with fight in my heart and appreciation in my core. I live everyday knowing that there are going to be plenty of things trying to stop me from being all I can be but with the lessons I've learned in my rear view and my friends in my head I can get through any road block that gets in my way.— **Anonymous**

MY JOURNEY

I was born in Massachusetts & my life & childhood had its ups & downs. At the age of 13 years old I was put into custody of Department of Social Services for running away from home. At 14 years old I found out that my dad that raised me was dying of AIDS. At the age of 16 years old he died & that was the day my life honestly went downhill. At the age of 18 I got pregnant. At the age of 23 I got pregnant. I started to use drugs, just coke at first but then it went to doing heroin with it & my life went down the tubes. My addiction had gotten worse. I spent 5 years of my life in prison & before all this I never had a criminal record. During my sentence I worked but I also did a drug program to teach me how to live clean & sober but I also took a parenting class to teach me how to be a mother to my children. After being released I got reunited with my family & still remained clean & sober started doing everything right. Today I still remain clean & sober; its now about to go on 9 years of sobriety & going strong.— **Brooke**

WINDHAM COUNTY REENTRY COUNCIL

I AM A SURVIVOR

Where I am today it all began when my family was hit with a tragic family event. Myself and my three boys were slammed with the loss of a husband and father. One day he was there, and the next he was gone, passed away in his sleep. I tried so hard to keep my family going, but it wasn't enough. I turned to drinking, one drink turned into too many. That is when life fell apart for me and my boys. My responsibility went out the window. I began drinking from morning till I passed out basically. My children were put in temporary custody to my in-laws until I can get it together. But that was the tip of the iceberg. I lost all self-control and fell deeper into the bottle. My children were my life, but the bottle was more important. I began drinking and driving, getting arrested, not once, but four times in five months. The judge was not having it. I was sentenced to two years in York Correctional. I hit rock bottom. When I did my time, I revisited my values of my life, what I did to my family and to myself. I learned who I was again. When I wasn't programming, I was working full-time in laundry. That is when I met an inspirational boss who taught me not to give up. My boys were waiting to come home to a stronger mom, who fought to be better and stronger for herself and her children. He told me if I could do this, I can do anything. So when I look back at the past two years I realized life is too precious. I still go to groups and with the support of my family and my AA groups, I know I will be alright.— **Brenda**

See your goal
Understand the obstacles
Create a positive mental picture
Clear your mind of self doubt
Embrace the challenge
Stay on track
Show the world you can do it

MY SECOND CHANCE

My life has never been easy. Seems I was surviving one fight or another every day. In 2013, my life turned completely upside down when I quit my job to tend to a sick child. I became desperate for money. A friend said he knew someone who would be interested in buying some of my meds. Sadly his friend turned out to be a cop. On 10/22/13 at 10 pm, I was raided and arrested for drug sales in February. I was sentenced to 2 yrs., 1 day, 3 yrs. parole. Terrified I took this opportunity to regroup and refocus. I took as many groups as possible that dealt with mental health and drug issues including The Marilyn Baker Program. At just about one year, I was awakened and told to pack; I was leaving. Today I am preparing on reentering society. After 6 months in a halfway house, I am employed at a local café and moving up the ranks having already received 2 raises. I have started to rebuild my burnt bridges with family and friends. My life may not be pretty but I got another chance to get it right and I am taking advantage.— **Carrie S.**

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

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CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

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

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, lbaird@csimail.org &
 Kristin LaFemina, klafemina@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, jscrapchancky@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**