

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

BRIDGEPORT REENTRY AWARDS CEREMONY



First and foremost I want to thank Jesus my Lord and Savior for availing me of such opportunities, mainly because just 4 years ago I was standing in front of a judge pleading to get my sentence reduced, and now I'm standing in front of you beautiful people accepting a reentry award along with speaking on behalf of the Matthew Semple Scholarship Award. I am truly honored and thankful for everyone who has helped me up until this point. I've been home shortly and already I feel I have accomplished so much, but not on my own. I thank my mother who has stuck with me through thick and thin when I was a knucklehead; I'm no longer a knucklehead, but she loved me even when I was. I also send my regards to Bridgeport Parole and Community Services and my Parole Officer Jack Wallace for nominating me for this award. Of all the people he could have chosen, he chose me and that is indicative of a testimony. I thank Project Longevity, Family ReEntry, and the American Jobs Center to name a few for leading me in the right direction. I'm thrilled to say that in this month of May I'll be graduating from Housatonic with a certificate in Advanced Manufacturing. I have an internship that will be a full time job, and I'm very proud to say that I

will have a career and not only job. To speak on behalf of the scholarship, these funds will be very rewarding to a great candidate. The Advanced Manufacturing Program has already changed my life, and I believe there will be more testimonies to come. No matter how young or old, you are never in a position bad enough for God to turn things around and use you; I am living proof of that. — **Jermaine B.**

2015 DIRECTOR'S COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD HONOREE

In a ceremony at FBI Headquarters on April 15, 2016, Director James B. Comey recognized the recipients of the 2015 Director's Community Leadership Award. These leaders, selected by their area FBI field office, have demonstrated outstanding contributions to their local communities through service. The FBI is grateful for the work of each of these individuals and organizations on behalf of their communities.



*FBI Director James B. Comey with Honoree Dan Braccio
Nominated by the New Haven Division*

"[This year's honorees] have done extraordinary good across communities in this country and have made a lasting difference," said Director Comey. "Thank you for that good, thank you for what you represent, and thank you for inspiring not just the FBI but this entire country."

(Excerpt taken from: <https://www.fbi.gov/about/community-outreach/dcla/2015/new-haven-dan-braccio>)

SUCCESS IS EARNED

My name is **Raquel C.** I was born in Montgomery, Alabama on a road trip, yes a road trip! Raised in Harlem, N.Y., things weren't always easy growing up. In fact, it was hard. I am now able to fully understand that the things I went through in my younger years had a negative effect in my adulthood. Full of pain, confusion and not many positive role-models at the time, I was a recipe for disaster and began to make choices that weren't conducive for me or the pathway my choices had me on. I was arrested a few times. The experience of being arrested

was a positive awakening so I became wiser, taking responsibility for my actions. I became employed with a good job. After nine years and two children, I wanted change. Considering my record, I was in urgent need of help with a new career choice as well as someone who could understand the sensitivity of my situation. A friend of mine recommended a reentry program called M.E.E.T (Motivate-Educate-Eat-Think), housed under The Council of Churches in Bridgeport. Not knowing much about the program or Bridgeport, I went in hopeful and determined to make a positive impact in my children's lives. I was elated once I entered the program to find out what the program was like, and, in a short while, all the love and support that was extended to me made this an effective and meaningful period of time. I became overwhelmed and pleased. This program has equipped me to enter into job opportunities that are offering double what I made at my recent job. I was taught, I studied and I received a perfect score on one exam and high honors on another. As I write, I sit here with a heart full of gratitude and a completeness in knowing that it takes dedication to clean up the wreckage of your past. With hard work and remaining teachable, waste no time applying the skills learned in your life and never stop seeking after what you deserve. Failure is not an option for you, or me. Knowledge is limitless; success is earned.



MY PROCESS IS MY SUCCESS



Ten years ago, I accepted a yearlong prison sentence, which unbeknownst catapulted me into the PROCESS of responsibility by embracing reality and the restorative PROCESS OF LEARNING TO LOVE ME. My process has stripped me of my masks, shattered my illusions, and eliminated my excuses. My process was birthed in the furnace of affliction. My process has trained me to become comfortable with ALL TRUTH no matter how uncomfortable. Sitting with the uncomfortability of ALL TRUTH, my process corrects, counsels, and compels me to seek the lesson. My process always teaches me a lesson. My process leads me to TRUST beyond my senses. My process strengthens me with the faith and courage to walk through the fear, shame, and pain of the past. Today, my process illuminates three essentials of self-awareness: value, time, and freedom, which I vigilantly preserve. My process nurtures my healing as I learn to treat myself with patience, compassion, tolerance, and love. Thus, my process has empowered me to apply these essentials to ALL OF MY RELATIONSHIPS.

Today, I am a mentor for the REACH-UP program. I mentor men on parole and cultivate constituents. The dimensions of my mentoring relationships are an authentic modeling of the essential values, identifying the benefits of those essentials, and being supportive when their discomfort occurs. As a mentor, I consistently emphasize awareness and strengthen the mentees' skills to navigate their re-entry process. Currently, the mentees have demonstrated increased engagement with case managers resulting in a reduction in recidivism. I'm thankful to the following constituents that expanded my vision of the re-entry landscape: Men's Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model, UCC Mass Incarceration workshops, Restorative Justice Panelist Stigma/ Mercy Conference, the CT ACLU, CT Fair Chance Coalition and many others. - **Anderson C.**

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CHANGING LIVES



**HARTFORD ROCKS!!! HARTFORD ROCKS!!! HARTFORD ROCKS!!!
9 BRAVE RELEASED INMATES DARE TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES**

The first graduating class of the Hartford P.R.I.D.E. (People Reentering Into Doing Entrepreneurship) PROGRAM occurred May 4, 2016, at Hartford City Hall. It was a day filled with excitement as family and friends were able to see students who completed their business studies course. Dianne Jones, the newly appointed Hartford Reentry Director, gave some opening remarks and then introduced Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin who delivered a congratulatory speech and handed out the diplomas. One student was unable to attend due to an accident that landed him in the hospital. Rio Comaduran from Project Longevity and Dianne Jones both met at the hospital and presented the student with his diploma!

A citation from U.S. Congressman John Larson was also read for the creation of the program which is exclusively for inmates, released inmates and people with a criminal background to learn how to go into business for themselves. P.R.I.D.E. is a unique, one of a kind training course that either has or will soon have training sites in Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, Hartford, and at the Cybulski Reintegration Center in Enfield. Also, it will be staffing a "welcome back to the community office" for returning citizens in the soon to be opened Unified Bridgeport Resource Center.

The students represented all different types of businesses that will be opening soon such as: aquaponics (water, fish and vegetables growing together), Green Machine Landscaping, life coaching, event planning, fundraising, rehabbing houses, home and office cleaning service, catering/food truck, general construction, and assisting people being released from prison

Due to the tremendous impact of the training on students, Mayor Bronin has given P.R.I.D.E. a training site right in City Hall. The next Hartford course will start Wednesday, September 7, at 9:00 a.m. To pre-register/for information, call Barry Diamond @ 203-767-4090 or email theprideprogram2@gmail.com.

"Today is the first day of the rest of my life". This was the utterance of a released inmate as he faced an audience of service providers and community leaders in New Haven, Connecticut. It was a realization of what was to come as he faced his first day out of prison. With only his sweat pants and shirt, a box filled with all of his earthly belongings, no money in his pocket, no job, no food and dropped off at the driveway of a strange half-way house, he would begin his life again. After many years of incarceration everything was strange and new to him. He came out of the darkness into the light with only the bare necessities to survive. But survive he did with the help of community programs, his faith and helping, caring hands in the neighborhood. He now owns a successful restaurant and is giving back to his community through paying taxes, employing released inmates and supporting local efforts to keep released inmates from going back to prison. That is why we need to continue funding as many programs as possible to keep our communities safe and give a second chance to released inmates. www.reentrysurvivors.com

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

In 2000, I was indicted by the United States Department of Justice and sentenced to nearly 16 years in federal prison before that conviction was discarded. At the time, I had no clear perspective on life, no sense of what I wanted to do other than to live a life akin to the likes of what Puff Daddy and Jay-Z depicted in songs and videos.

It was in and through that experience that, with unflinching faith, an impassioned heart, and a determined mind, I was able to hit the reset button on my life and reframe my notion of what "living" actually was. I was blessed enough to matriculate into college and earn a B.S. in psychology; receive an addiction counselor in training certification; and study for the ministry of people – all while incarcerated. Moreover, I had the audacity to write a book, *Nine Steps to Fall Up When You Trip Down*, that has been nominated by 2016 Indie Author Legacy Awards for Author of the Year (Spirituality)!

Today, I am a social service worker, director of a reentry-based agency, and an addiction counselor. People say, "never in my wildest dreams did I imagine being *fill-in-the-blank*", but I did. I did because I know the power of God, the resilience of life, and the good will of people.

There were some who questioned each other, "Is there anything good that can come from Nazareth?" about a change agent, innovative thinker, and a person of impact named Jesus, which is no different than what many say about individuals returning to society from incarceration. My response to them, as was the few people who believed in His purpose, "Come and see." Change is not only POSSIBLE...it is PROBABLE! - **Louis R.**



FAITH, DETERMINATION AND PURPOSE

It still seems surreal to me as I continue to learn more about society. It seems to me as if I am still in my cell watching a documentary of someone's life, but that someone is me. I could only describe it as, when I plant my foot on the ground, the pavement becomes real and I get a sensation and confirmation that these are the steps. I'm supposed to be taking the appropriate steps in my journey. These steps did not start when I left prison to start life in a halfway house, but years before when I honestly took a look at my life and said, "Orlando, you're going to be released in a couple of years." Then I thought, "Okay, what are you going to do about it?" I started visualizing and running scenarios in my head about things that I would be confronted with and utilized tools from a program I took many years ago called Thresholds.

As I prepared, I knew I needed my identification, reentry classes and all the support possible. I had been incarcerated nearly three decades and had absolutely nothing but just my faith, determination and purpose. So while incarcerated, I was introduced to a medical billing and coding program taught by Linda Dixon. She was an invaluable resource as I found I loved this course of study. As I transition home, I am still taking classes on the weekends with her and I am grateful for the opportunity. My days start at 4:30 a.m. and continue until 9:30 p.m. (almost the same way they were when I was on the inside), but preparation is key. Then, it was meeting with my family, though I did have continual communication with them throughout my incarceration, but it's different now. It's as if the people in the pictures that I've seen for so many years are now moving and speaking to me. It's like a movie.

I am so very appreciative for all the help and assistance I am receiving from different organizations. This is because I was not embarrassed to say, "I need help and don't want to go backwards." Life is going good. I know that without a doubt my transition is going to be successful. I have God in my heart guiding me along with my family giving me the support and encouragement I need, and CPA allowing me to step out into my destiny. God bless you. – **Orlando R.**

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POSITIVE PEER TO PEER MENTORING

Words meant to inspire from behind the walls...

Before coming to prison, I was a menace to my community, so I was removed from my community. Before coming to prison I lived as if I did not have any responsibilities, so I was placed where I had little to no responsibility. I was a completely negative and counter-productive person, so I was placed where I felt degraded and useless. I couldn't be trusted, so I was placed where there was little to no trust in me. I was overflowing with hatred and anger and I used these feelings as an excuse to hurt others, so they sent me to a place where living this way was the norm. I was not a loving and compassionate person, so I was placed where there was no love. They wanted me to be non-violent, so they placed me where people used violence as a means to an end. They said I could be a winner, so they placed me where they house all the losers. They wanted me to take a good long look into myself so I could have a clear picture of who I was and how I was living, so they placed me where people lived and acted just like me; and when I was finally capable of processing what I saw, I was disgusted with the life I had led to that point.

So, I began a journey and I started to identify the root causes of my actions and behaviors. I started to challenge my belief system and stopped looking for an outside source to blame for my shortcomings in life. I came to terms with the fact that I am not a product of my environment and/or my circumstances in life, rather I am a direct result of the choices and decisions I made. After years and years of introspection, lots of prayer, counseling sessions, groups, programs, help from God, some extremely dedicated counselors, and some men who were locked up with me, I made the choice to grab the help I so desperately needed. I took advantage of every opportunity offered to me. I was determined, focused and ready to do whatever it took to change the person I was.

Today, I stand before you and I can say proudly, "I am finally a man." Today, I am a product of a process of rehabilitation that is fueled daily by a genuine desire to live a better life. To be someone who makes a positive contribution to society. I have used the resources offered to me to facilitate this change. The axiom goes, "what we do always speaks louder than what we say". Today, I can tell you that **Brian S.**, father of four, brother, uncle, son, and friend is a reformed human being, but, even better yet, I will let my actions do my talking.

The foundation is in place to continue building a healthy and productive life once I am given a chance at freedom. There are many days that go by where I sit back and reflect over the years of my life I spent in prison, both physically and mentally, and the biggest thing that jumps out at me is how deplorable my behavior and outlook on life were. It is crystal clear to me today that outside of prison there is no room in society for anyone who chooses to live and act as I did. I deserved and needed to come to prison.

Over the past two decades, I have been blessed with the opportunity to identify and address the problems in my life. The desired effects, to punish me for past behaviors, to deter me from acting this way in the future, and to rehabilitate me into a productive and positive human being have been reached. This journey through life has been marked by extremes and I have come to learn that, if I wanted to grow into someone people wanted to be around, change was mandatory. I have worked diligently at this change and through this process I have had the time to start growing into the man I desired to be, no longer a liability to the world but an asset.—**Brian S.**



CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

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, aconnor@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
Chance Jackson
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, 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
The MASC Center
173 Interstate Lane, 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.

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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.

