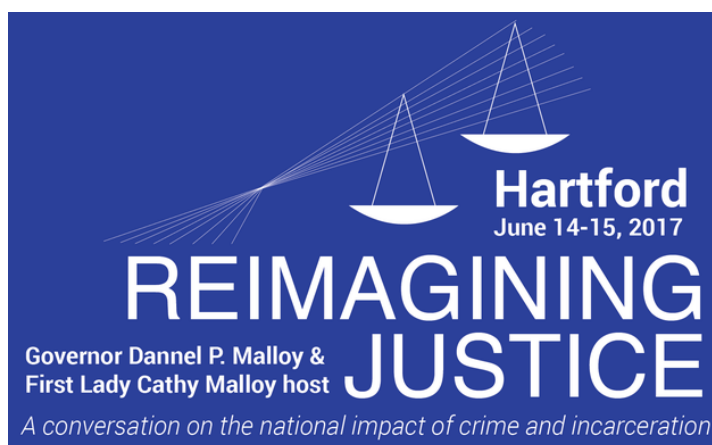


# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Reimagining Justice Conference



Governor Dannel P. Malloy and First Lady Cathy Malloy hosted *Reimagining Justice* Conference on June 14-15, 2017 in Hartford. Criminal justice professionals from across the country joined the conversation on the impact of crime and incarceration. Mrs. Malloy was the driving force for this conference and in her opening remarks she stated, “We have to reimagine justice to align with our core values: fairness, equality, humanity, forgiveness and second chances.”

The conference opened with a special performance by the Judy Dworin Performance Project highlighting issues of incarceration by women who have experienced it. Over the two-day conference, panel discussions focused on young adults, pretrial, incarceration, and reentry. Special keynote speaker was Valerie Jarrett, former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama.

The first day ended with a special reception at Capital Community College where attendees had an opportunity to network and learn more about innovative programs run by institutions of higher education. This event also highlighted the Annual Prison Arts Show run by Community Partners in Action.

Check out conference highlights at <http://portal.ct.gov/reimaginingjustice>.



# CT REENTRY VOICES

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## 6th Annual Greater Hartford Reentry Employment & Resource Fair



From left to right: Daryl McGraw, John Santa, DOC Commissioner Scott Semple, Cheryl McDonald, Sue Gunderman, Representative Brandon McGee, Louis Lista and Judy McBride

The Greater Hartford Reentry Council and the Chrysalis Center, Inc. held the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Greater Hartford Reentry Employment and Resource Fair and Employer Breakfast Symposium on Tuesday, March 7, 2017 at the Hartford Marriott Downtown. This event was supported by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Prior to the fair, there was a panel discussion “*Access to Employment Opportunities for Returning Citizens*” with State Representative Brandon McGee D-Hartford, Mayor Luke Bronin, City of Hartford; John Santa, Malta Justice Initiative; Daryl McGraw, DMHAS; Cheryl McDonald, Co-owner Bear’s Smokehouse BBQ; Louis Lista, Owner Pond House Café/Zest 280 and Sue Gunderman, STRIDE and Co-Chair Greater Hartford Reentry Council. After the breakfast, the fair provided a unique opportunity for about 200 returning citizens to show prospective employers they were job ready. Participating in this event were more than 40 employers and resource vendors. In addition to finding employment, there was an opportunity for participants to obtain information on local schools, training programs and community organizations providing support.—**Sue Gunderman, STRIDE Program**



# CT REENTRY VOICES

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## “So You’re Saying There’s a Chance. . .”

Do you remember that line? It’s from the end of the movie “Dumb and Dumber” when Jim Carrey’s character optimistically reacts to being told that he has a one in million shot of going out with Lauren Holly. Now in the movie we all know that there really is no chance. Jim isn’t going to end up with the girl. But when you are being released from jail, one in a million... you’ll take those odds. All you want is a chance. I was one of the over one hundred former offenders who attended the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Greater Hartford Reentry Fair in March. I was one of the former offenders who got dressed in the best clothes they could find, walked into the middle of a banquet room, and told their story to strangers. It was a daunting proposition, but a necessary one.

When you are about to be released you hear all kinds of stories about how hard it is to find a job. Once you are on the outside, you realize that the stories are not just true, but they are somewhat sugar coated. But then you enter a job fair designed solely for people like you. People who made a mistake, but want nothing more than a chance. A chance to get back on their feet. A chance to earn a solid wage to support their family. A chance to regain some of the dignity they lost while incarcerated. Businesses like Eversource, Bear’s Smokehouse, and Home Depot all had representatives collecting resumes. Companies like Easter Seals Goodwill, Wheeler Clinic, and LAZ Parking all greeted people with a smile, and asked the question we all were longing to hear, “How can we help you?”

Now I am sure there is already an article in this newsletter talking about how the job fair was a great success. And it was. Numerous employers coupled with dozens of job seekers is a beautiful thing to see at a job fair. Of course, there is no guarantee any of us who attended will actually get a job. The final numbers on who was hired won’t be out for a while, if they are ever really known. But as a person who walked into the room, seeing all of the possibilities, I immediately felt like things were looking up. As I spoke to each employer, all I could think was, “so you’re saying there’s a chance...” And that... that is all I need.— **John T.**



## My Journey Home

Life as I once knew it, to what I absolutely know it to be now, is not only totally different in terms of what it seems now...but a faded memory or dream. In terms of my time spent as a free man...to say that I prepared for this day of physical liberation in the moments that followed is an understatement. Yes, I've worked hard (which I've encouraged many of you in my same shoes to do the very same...), and many of you know I will continue to work extremely hard from point forward to reach my dreams and aspirations while never giving up or giving in to the cheers of defeat. Now, I stand tall and proud as a returning citizen back to my respected community as a contributor. I challenge and encourage each and every one of you, men and women, to do the very same!

In short, when I was in prison I committed myself to having a plan which is one of the very best decisions a prisoner can and must make for themselves while incarcerated. In addition to having developed a plan for my life post imprisonment, I discovered the importance of having a plan while in prison to be just as important and I did exactly that.

So in closing, never compare yourselves to anyone but yourself. I believe one's self is the truest measuring stick of reference to show one's growth. Today, I'm successful in every area and phase of my life. I still face challenges and struggles, however the biggest contrast for me is that today I allow others to help and assist me with my struggles and challenges. So if I can do it, anyone of you can do it.— **Sincere Y.**



# CT REENTRY VOICES

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## Second Chance Pell Initiative Offers Chance for Change in Prison

The United States Department of Education selected 69 higher education sites throughout the country to participate in the **Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative**.

The program allows incarcerated adults, who would otherwise qualify for a Pell Grant, to attend college in prison. Of the 69 sites nationwide that were chosen, four were in Connecticut. Nine Connecticut correctional facilities are hosting the program, with over 400 students currently enrolled.

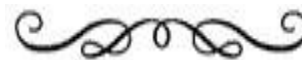
Incarcerated students can earn an Associate's Degree or Certificate in majors that are in demand by the state's employers.



When the program was first announced in the summer of 2016, there was some resistance from correctional staff and the public. However, as people became aware that only students who would qualify for the program in the community can participate, they have slowly warmed up to the idea. As one housing officer recently said, "It's a lot easier to run a block when everyone is busy doing homework."

One recent participant, Wilfredo, was released to the community at the end of March. He contacted the Connecticut Department of Correction to say that the program meant a lot to him and that he was going to continue on the outside.

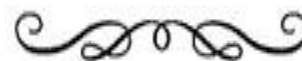
Higher education can be the key to opening up doors to opportunity and help keep individuals on the path they want to follow. As my father told me years ago, "They can take away everything from you, but once you earn an education, no one can take that away." — **Tom Maskell, Department of Correction**



### Special Acknowledgement

Waterbury Mayor Neil M. O'Leary is a strong supporter of the Reentry Council and their efforts to provide services that will assist persons to become productive citizens of Waterbury.

Mayor O'Leary stated, "I applaud Barry Diamond's program, People Reentering Into Doing Entrepreneurship (PRIDE) as a key component to this service."



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## My Story of Redemption: My Success & Hope



My name is Larry J. I am 60 years old and was born in North Africa, in Morocco. I was raised in New London, CT with seven sisters, the only boy in the family, seventh child born just before my baby sister. My father was a Navy veteran of 23 years, so he was gone a lot which left me with my mom and sisters. With no positive male role models in my home, I looked to the streets to find them. I learned over the years this would prove to be a grave mistake. I became caught up in the judicial system at a very early age. It started with skipping school and hanging out with older teens. I did not know the ramifications these actions would have on my life in such a negative way. With these actions came drinking, smoking weed, popping pills, and that led to stronger, more life altering drugs: heroin, cocaine, and crack. This drug use led me down a dark, bleak road that included depression, shame, guilt and low self-esteem and, subsequently, a constant involvement with the criminal justice system. Sentenced to juvenile detention and school for boys, then the adult prison system resulted in my being incarcerated for more than 15 years which cost me dearly over 60 years of my life. This struggle continued through my adult life. I tried AA, NA, and all sorts of help programs but always ended up where I started, strung out, homeless and back in jail.

The only time I truly found peace, strength, and encouragement is when I totally turned my life over to God, and dedicated myself to helping others. At this present time, I have 4 years clean and sober! A big part of my awakening came through the organization Youth Challenge. There I was introduced to men who shared my life struggles and pitfalls, and who were successful and drug free. These men were respectful, upstanding citizens of the community. I wanted that. I've been free of the prison system completely since 2013. Happily married three years now, I have steady employment and am growing every day. Currently I am a mentor at The Writer's Block, using my past to encourage, guide, and motivate our youth to be the best they can be, and to help them avoid the pitfalls and traps of our criminal justice system. It is my hope to help young people set and achieve their goals. I want to be the positive role model I needed when I was their age. — **Larry J.**



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Sixth Annual Reentry Awards Ceremony Held In Bridgeport

The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative hosted its Sixth Annual Reentry Awards Ceremony on Friday, May 19 at Housatonic Community College. More than 200 people attended the event, MC'ed by Career Resource's Scott Wilderman, which recognized 71 awardees in three categories, Personal Achievement, Community Partner, and Professional of the Year. In addition, the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative presented a Special Appreciation Award to U.S. Attorney Deirdre Daly and the Staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office for their "dedication to Justice for all." Holly Wasilewski, USAO Reentry & Community Outreach Coordinator, accepted the award for Attorney Daly, who was attending her son's graduation in Virginia, from U.S. District Court (CT) Judge Stefan Underhill. In his presentation remarks, Judge Underhill candidly shared how U.S. Attorneys and their staffs can often be at odds with judges in prosecutorial cases. However, he praised Attorney Daly as someone "who gets it" when it comes to working with people who have committed federal offenses and who will someday return back to their community. She and her staff have been consistently supportive of reentry efforts around the state, and the recent hiring of Ms. Wasilewski to represent the office has demonstrated that. Holly also stayed at the podium to hand out the Personal Achievement awards which recognized formerly incarcerated persons who have made remarkable progress toward their reentry goals, including securing employment, starting businesses, obtaining higher education degrees, and giving back to their community in a variety of ways. Sue Gunderman of STRIDE and the Co-Chair of the Greater Hartford Reentry Council did the honors with the Community Partner awards and explained her HIRE ONE campaign in her opening remarks. All of the attendees had HIRE ONE buttons at their tables and were deputized by Sue to spread the message to area businesses, "Be the key to unlock an individual's potential." Dr. Sandy Martin, Managing Director of the CT Center for Social Innovation, exhorted the audience to dream big and do things that have not been done – yet, citing initiatives that are already happening, before handing out the Professional of the Year awards. The final highlight of the evening was the presentation of the 2017 Urdang-Torres Community Impact Award to the Jay Brothers' Unified Resource Center. The Center was one of the final wishes of Jay Brothers who was deeply active with the recovery community before his death in 2015. Recovery Network of Programs (RNP) CEO John Hamilton accepted the award for the Center. John's friendship with Jay was the catalyst in prompting RNP to donate one of their buildings for the center to serve the entire reentry community. Jay's family including his wife, Jen, were also in attendance for this momentous occasion.—**Dan Braccio**



Career Resources' Scott Wilderman presenting the 2017 Urdang-Torres Community Impact to Recovery of Network Programs CEO John Hamilton on behalf of the Jay Brothers' Unified Resource Center.



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Celebrating National Reentry Week 2017

Connecticut celebrated National Reentry Week from April 23 -29<sup>th</sup> 2017. Here are some of the events that took place during that week.

### NEW HAVEN

On Thursday, April 27, 2017, at Gateway Community College in New Haven, there was a statewide conference hosted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Connecticut, called, *"Give Someone With a Record a Second Chance and Hire One"*. The keynote speaker was Mr. Kevin Myatt from Yale New Haven Health, the Senior Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer who spoke about their "HOPE" program on how they have offered second chances to members of the community with records.

About 125 people attended to listen to several panels as well the keynote speaker. The panels consisted of: Law Enforcement & Judiciary (the U.S. Attorney, Deirdre M. Daly; Federal District Court Judge Jeffrey Alker Meyer, New Haven Police Chief Anthony Campbell, and Federal Probation Officer Jen Amato), Second Chance Employers and Employed Returning Citizens. This was the third such event over the last year, spearheaded by Ms. Daly, to prompt more employers to learn of the incentives of hiring someone with a record, which can ultimately reduce violence and recidivism and inspire returning citizens to become productive citizens.



George Chelso, left, and Olysha Staten, both with Community Solutions, chat with Johnnie Williams, with the City of Waterbury Health Department

### WATERBURY

The Greater Waterbury Reentry Council sponsored a Reentry Services Resource Fair on April 27<sup>th</sup> at Waterbury City Hall. Twenty three community partners joined together to provide support and resources for individuals in the Waterbury area. This event was to help returning citizens find jobs, assist with healthcare, and provide them with guidance around their transition home.

### HARTFORD

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, the Greater Hartford Reentry Council in collaboration with the City of Hartford held a community conversation hosted at the Alliance, CT Nonprofit Center in Hartford. Special guests included Governor Malloy, Mayor Bronin, employers and returning citizens. This event highlighted local employers as they are key to an individual's successful reentry.



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Probation Tip. . .Don't Get Cocky

In the Fall newsletter, I wrote a column about how to survive probation providing what I thought would be three helpful tips on wading through the daily trials and tribulations associated with coming out of jail, and yet still being under someone's supervision. Three tips may not be all inclusive, but I thought they worked pretty well. I am now here to revise that list, or rather add to it. My latest tip... Don't Get Cocky. Now, I know this seems like a strange proposition. I mean, we are all still under the thumb of the state... and at any moment they can decide we did something wrong and send us back. Yet, we don't all think that way. Here's what happens.

You struggled to find a place to live, then you got one; a pretty decent apartment that you can call your own. You have a really hard time finding a job, but someone gave you a chance and you are excelling. You were riding the bus, and now you finally have your own car. You have friends who have stuck by you, and you even have been able to make new friends, maybe find a partner to love. Things are looking up for you. How can you not feel pretty good about yourself? Personally, I know I was feeling pretty good, almost as if I had this probation thing beat. That is when they get you. It's not because "probation is a set-up" like some people have said. We all know people who have been violated, sent back to prison, who then shout to anyone who will listen that they were set up to fail. It's not that they were set-up, it's that we set ourselves up. We got cocky. Hubris is one of the seven deadly sins for a reason. To put it simply, we get comfortable. We start thinking that maybe we can go to the bar and have a drink. Hey, you haven't had a urine test in months, you are in the clear. Yes, I may not be allowed to leave the state without a pass, but my buddy just got us Yankee tickets and I am going to go... nobody will find out. You got too comfortable, you got cocky. You started thinking you have all the freedoms that the rest of the world has. I am sorry to say, you don't. If you are doing something you are not supposed to be doing, there is a good chance you are going to get caught. Remember... you are a felon. You were incarcerated. That means you got caught once before. What makes you think you are so good now that it won't happen again?

I am not saying you need to walk around paranoid, afraid that every siren you hear is coming for you. That is not the case. Live your life, go to work, the supermarket, hang out with friends... but abide by the rules and stipulations set forth by probation. You are out of jail, but you are not fully free. Things are going well, and the only way to keep them going in that direction is to stay humble, stay on the path... and don't let yourself get cocky.— **John T.**

## HangTime

My name is Marit Rutten and I'm from the Netherlands. Since August, I have been studying national security in the United States.

If you asked me one year ago what I think about criminals, you would get a total different answer than if you would ask me today. Why? Because I have visited "HangTime" in Bridgeport. During HangTime, people like lawyers, prosecutors, neighborhood residents, students, and ex-criminals talk with each other about society topics. When I was there for the first time we talked about heroin babies. Some people were born as heroin babies and they told their stories about growing up. At this point, my perspective about criminality has changed.

Every day you read articles on social media or newspapers about criminal acts, and people's first reaction will be, "Why did they do that? It is wrong and they need to be punished for what they did". However, it is not always that simple. At first, it needs to be said that the perpetrators probably should not have done what they did. Still, it is not fair to blame them right away for their crime. There is always a story behind a crime and most of the time you can't hear the story of the perpetrator.

At HangTime, people can share their experiences. It is a safe place, you don't have to be afraid of what other people think or be ashamed. The experience of HangTime is extraordinary and I think that everyone should know about the other part of a crime. The story of a perpetrator should be told and people should listen to this. It has changed my perspective and every time when I read an article about a crime, I realize there is another side of the story that has not been told. But maybe, that part is even more important than the actual crime.— **Marit Rutten**