

CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

REHABILITATION CENTER DEDICATED



Commissioner Scott Semple speaks at the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center dedication ceremony as Governor Malloy and Lt. Governor Wyman look on.

With Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman among the approximately 200 guests on hand, the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center was officially dedicated on Tuesday, April 21, 2015. The reintegration center is one of the four initiatives that Commissioner Scott Semple set out to implement during his tenure. The concept behind the center is to centralize and concentrate the department's reentry efforts for offenders nearing their end of sentence in one location in order to improve their chances for successful reentry. The new initiative will rely on partnerships with schools, churches, community and health care providers. The ultimate goal is to reduce the rate of recidivism of the program's participants.

The Cybulski Community Reintegration Center is modeled after a similar program run by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. Last year, Commissioner Semple sent three DOC staff members to Ohio to observe and learn how the program operated. The initial unit of the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center had been up and running for more than a month prior to the ceremony and is made up of 110 offenders who reside in one of the facility's six dormitory units. In time, the plan is to convert the remainder of the housing units to reintegration units. The hope is that the next unit will consist of offenders who had previously served in the military. A reintegration unit for women at the York Correctional Institution is also being planned. The reintegration center at Cybulski was organized using money in the current budget and did not involve additional spending. "This is not a soft on crime approach, it's a smart reentry approach," Commissioner Semple told reporters after the ceremony. "We're trying to target the population that has done what we've asked them to do, and then have a place for them to go and a program for them to be at that sends a message to the rest of the population that you should do the same."

The dedication ceremony which was held in the facility's gymnasium was attended by invited guests, among which included state and local politicians, representatives of other state agencies and community providers. Commissioner Semple, Warden John Tarascio, Lt. Governor Wyman and Governor Malloy all addressed the gathered throng. In addition to the guests and dignitaries, several television cameras and print journalists were there to document this important occasion.

The reintegration program at Cybulski dovetails with Governor Malloy's recently announced Second Chance Society initiative, in which he proposes to: reclassify certain nonviolent offenses; eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug possession; streamline the parole system; streamline the pardons system; and create job and housing opportunities for ex-offenders.

"This is a momentous occasion because it makes a break with the past," Governor Dannel P. Malloy said. "From 1985 to 2008, we tripled the population in our jails. We built great prisons, even during a time when we refused to build great schools."

BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE

FROM THE BOARD ROOM TO JAIL ROOM

My name is **Barry D.** One day in June, 2010, I was having lunch with mayors and state representatives, and the next day I was having lunch with murders, rapists, child molesters and bank robbers.

I had been the owner of a successful 30 year old business consulting company; had started the Chamber of Commerce in my home town; was on the board of my town's Economic Development Commission; was Vice-President of my town's Tax Abatement Commission; as well as President of my town's Library Foundation, and President-Elect of the Better Business Bureau of the State of Connecticut.

All that ended when I was convicted of a white collar crime and was sentenced to 6 years in prison. After two years of following repetitive, non-thinking actions with no decision making thoughts (before my early release in 2012), I was faced with thinking about how other released offenders successfully reentered society. What stumbling blocks did they have to overcome and how did they do it?

While in prison, I listened and learned a lot about the hopes and dreams of other incarcerated people. Many wanted to return to their families, find jobs and once again become members of the society they left. They were husbands, grandfathers, fathers, brothers, uncles and sons. I was determined to put my experience in prison to good use.

I now operate the www.reentrysurvivors.com website; am an active member of the Bridgeport Reentry Roundtable; and currently am teaching the first entrepreneurial course (called **P.R.I.D.E.**) in the state exclusively for formerly incarcerated people.

To those who have fallen in the past and want to get up to start a new life, *"If I am doing it so can you"*. I hope to see you at the end of the rainbow.



ENTREPRENEURIAL COURSE EXCLUSIVELY FOR RELEASED INCARCERATED PEOPLE

What started as an idea two years ago has now become a fully realized success story. I was teaching a reentry class about how to prepare for job interviews. I listened as many of my students were complaining about the quality of the jobs they were being offered. Several had worked as carpenters, painters, cooks, office managers, and computer operators. Now, the thought of having to work at a minimum wage job because they were labeled "ex-offenders" was depressing. They knew that they had to work to support themselves but at what occupation. I developed a skills interview sheet for them and discovered that many had not only skills but also the ambition to achieve. However, "soft skills" job readiness programs were the only option. After changing organizations, I taught a job readiness program again, only to find the same problem. Then, I decided to start an entrepreneurial course only for formerly incarcerated people. I selected 8 students out of all the people recommended by service providers and Parole Officers. The **P.R.I.D.E.** (People Reentering Into Doing Entrepreneurship) course began on May 1, 2015. Six students graduated from **P.R.I.D.E.** on June 26th.

The course is divided into nine 2.5-hour sessions which are 60% business information and 40% life skills. Each session is taught by an expert in their field including legal, banking, accounting, marketing, sales, computers, business plans and positive mental attitude. Upon graduating, the students will gain a business Mentor to follow up with them to ensure success.

Information on the **P.R.I.D.E.** program can be found on LinkedIn: Barry Diamond Reentry Survivors Trainer. In one month since beginning the account, we have over 2,500 connections throughout the U.S. in four main groups: lawyers/judges, DOC personnel, faith-based, and media. While currently only in Bridgeport, we are planning to make the **P.R.I.D.E.** program available in other Connecticut cities next year.

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BRIDGEPORT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE

GRATITUDE FOR SUPPORT



Project Longevity can be considered a savior to some people such as myself. Project Longevity is not just a program; it's a community of diverse knowledge. It's the family many of us have been looking for. Most programs promise jobs and assistance. Project Longevity promises jobs and assistance yet they seal the deal by actually following through and helping you get a job. When I first learned of Project Longevity I knew that I needed them. Before I was introduced to the Project Longevity family I was an unemployment check away from making a bad decision that could have taken my life for many more years. It's not just the program; it's the environment of the participants. It's the drive and eagerness of the staff. If need be they'll clothe, educate, and teach you not just how to get a job, but coach you on how to get and keep your job. I've been in many programs yet never one like this, which I am proud to be a part of. The best part of the program is Hang Time where we meet every Tuesday night to speak our minds about life, as well as learn about current events in the world. Project Longevity is a blessing for us all.— **William B.**

*When you **become** grateful for small pleasures, your **outlook** changes and **opportunities** seem to open up everywhere in your **life**.*

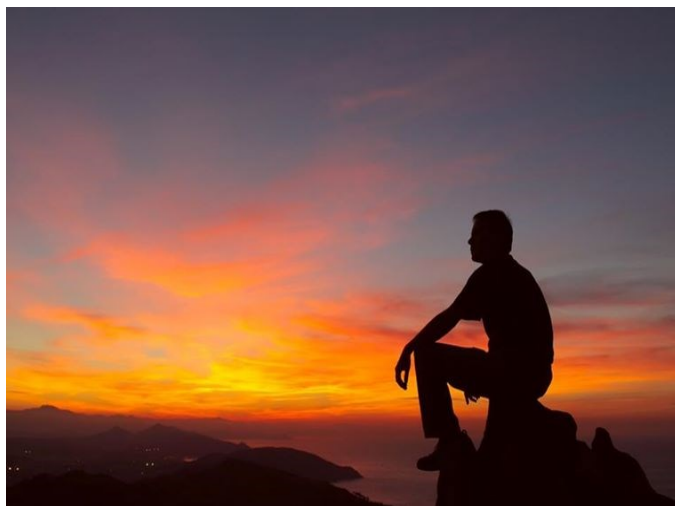
CT REENTRY VOICES

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GREATER HARTFORD REENTRY COUNCIL (GHREC)

INNER PEACE

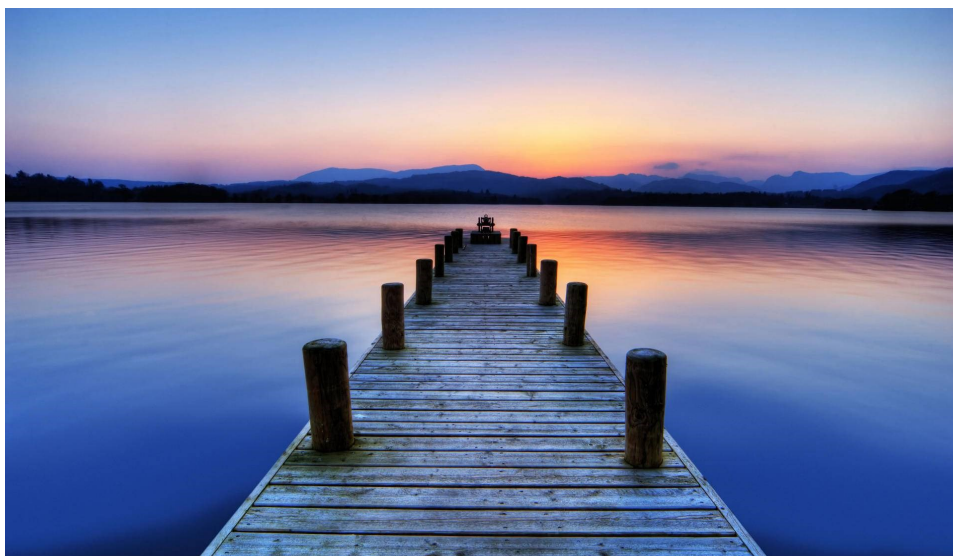
My name is **Kelvin Y.** and I haven't consumed alcohol or any other drug since March 6th 2009. After many years battling with drug addiction and depression, I received treatment for my addiction and began my healing process in a Tier III modified therapeutic community program in prison. Within the prison program, I learned about the transformative powers of yoga and meditation. By looking within, I was able to find inner peace while incarcerated. I was able to understand the root causes of my emotional pain which led to my drug addiction. What a powerful learning experience it was for me.



I learned that life is about learning, growing, and evolving. I have learned from these difficult experiences and have grown emotionally, mentally, and spiritually from the knowledge obtained from them. That knowledge has helped my consciousness to evolve. As a result, I've become more aware and I'm making intentional choices that better my life. Today, I sustain my health by eating a vegan based diet, exercising, practicing meditation, spending quality time in nature, and building healthy relationships with others. Through hard work and community support, I'm now a state Certified Addiction Recovery Coach, Recovery Support Specialist and Sound Healer. I'm currently the Assistant Executive Director of Advocacy Unlimited and Toivo Director, Advocacy Unlimited's peer-run, mind-body wellness center. I serve on the DMHAS Multicultural Advisory Council. I facilitate the Incarceration and Community Reentry workshop at The Connecticut Women's Consortium in Hamden, CT; received the 2014 Professional of the Year Award from the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative; and also received special recognition from U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) for being a positive role model and directly contributing to the success of reentry efforts. Learning to live intentionally transformed my life tremendously. I'm more mindful of my actions and how they affect others.

"The body heals with play, the mind heals with laughter and the spirit heals with joy."

~ Proverb



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SOUTHEASTERN CT REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

NEW LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE

When I got to this halfway house, it was like a big weight was lifted off my back. I've dreamed about this day and for it to be real life...WOW!!

On my ride here, it was like someone else was on the bus going in for the same thing I got sent to jail for back in the day; one more wake up call for me. My family asked why I picked this house so far away. You see, I made up my mind a long time ago that I'm not starting off in the same place...no way. There are too many sad stories in jail about comebacks. Not me!! Also, this is a great spot to get myself back in the community.



When they sat me down and read the rules to me about finding a job in 30 days, I just could not understand it one bit. Thirty (30) days to find work!? That was crazy! At first, I wasn't feeling it at all. I had just gotten out of jail after more than 20 years and they wanted me to find employment in 30 days?? Wow!! But thanks to Counselor Morrissey in the Job Center group at Carl Robinson CI and Ms. Delaney in CRCI School, I took their advice to be honest and never give up when looking for work. Yes, I had other people saying this would never work, but for me, trying something new was the way to go. And after all, I had new found freedom now. So I took the tools from class and it got me a job in 33 days and for me, that was the biggest highlight of my freedom. That and getting my kids back in my life.

I love being free. I still have a long way to go, but it's coming together for me now. Today I got paid, opened my first bank account and I paid my house rent. It felt good to be a part of the free world. I did it! Some may say bad things about me, but I made it, Players, after 21 years. It can be done, my Brothers. Heads up! — **Ronald D.**

WINDHAM COUNTY REENTRY COUNCIL

WORDS OF WISDOM

By the time you finish reading this, I hope my words of wisdom will encourage you all to enroll in the STRIDE program and to take the successful path that I have taken through them. When I got home January 5th, 2015, I was in a position where I had nothing but the clothes on my back, a couple pieces of mail and some important papers from jail. I didn't let that stop me though. Sixteen days later I landed my first job through word of mouth. "What did I do?" I asked every single person that I came across if they knew anybody that was hiring. I also put my pride to the side and would accept any job that was offered to me. I was that hungry and determined to find work. I stuck it out for a couple of months until I got a lead from my job developer, Rob. He told me to fill out an application at Frontier



which I would never would have filled out on my own. To sum my story up, the rest is history. I haven't been home six months yet; however, I somehow managed to get a job, a car, and an apartment...in that order. I don't want to sound like all those other success stories you read about in programs while you are incarcerated don't do anything for you, but if you don't get anything from reading this, please get this...the STRIDE program worked for me. They will do everything in their power to help you succeed. The question is...do you want it bad enough? — **Nathan R.**

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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, 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.