

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## CONNECTICUT'S WORKFORCE AND RETURNING CITIZENS

On Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup> a special forum was held to discuss *Connecticut's Workforce and Returning Citizens, What every employer should know about hiring people with a criminal record.* It was presented by MetroHartford Alliance, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Connecticut Department of Correction,



Greater Hartford Reentry Council and Connecticut Business and Industry Association. Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin provided opening remarks and was quoted as saying, "The most important message from this forum is that giving someone a second chance and looking beyond their past can actually be good for business. Employers tell me all the time that, when they hire individuals with criminal records, they often turn out to be among the most loyal, dedicated, hardworking employees – because they know how hard it was to get that chance."

The special guest panel included Scott Semple, CT Department of Correction Commissioner; Maureen Price-Boreland, Executive Director of Community Partners in Action; Cheryl McDonald, Co-owner of Bears BBQ; and Brian Delude from Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch. We also heard from two returning citizens who shared their struggles and how they overcame them by getting their education and finding employment.

Takeaways from this forum included a resource packet filled with incentives and information for employers around hiring someone with a record. We need to continue having community conversations around this topic to ensure our returning citizens have opportunities for second chances with the ability to secure employment paying a liveable wage in order to care for their families and remain out of incarceration. Working citizens becoming tax-paying citizens, I think we can agree in these difficult economic times, makes good business sense and makes human sense in building a second chance society. — **Sue Gunderman, STRIDE**



Join us for a special campaign called **"Hire One"**.

Providing a second chance to individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system makes good business sense. I know not every individual will work out due to the many challenges they face when they return home, but they are definitely worth the risk. When you hire anyone, with or without a record, there is always a risk. It is time we work together to support our returning citizens so they gain the necessary skills to obtain employment while earning a livable wage. Doing so will enable them to become tax payers and to care for their families, and, ultimately, will help to reduce recidivism by creating safer communities across our state. I, along with countless other community partners, will be having several conversations with employers and asking them to take a chance and start by hiring one individual and see where it can lead. Join us and spread the word. Learn more about the benefits and incentives for hiring returning citizens. Check out our website: [www.hireone.org](http://www.hireone.org) — **Sue Gunderman, STRIDE**

**BE THE KEY TO UNLOCK AN INDIVIDUAL'S POTENTIAL "HIRE ONE"**

**AND GAIN A WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE**

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## BUMPY ROAD TO SUCCESS

My name is **Justin W.** and my story of reentry started after a lengthy incarceration in the state of Virginia where I was part of warehousing at its finest, even being in a CCA facility which is the privately owned prisons that have become such big business. After spending twelve and a half years behind bars and essentially growing up in prison due to being tried as a adult at the age of 17, I was released via interstate compact to my wife in Middletown, CT for a new and fresh start.

I met my wife while incarcerated with four years left to serve on my sentence. We both thought we had the coming home part all wrapped up. I mean the hard part was over, right? I did the time, so the rest should have been easy. We were very wrong; my fight had really just started.

Coming from another state made it doubly hard for me because the people receiving me on this end were just as confused as I was. Paperwork was misplaced or mishandled and a lot of confusion left me grasping at straws at what were the right steps to take next. I struggled with every aspect of reentry. I reported to probation as I was instructed and must say they helped me a lot, but so much was missing and I had no clue where to look. Virginia released me back into the community with no plan as a struggling, chronically relapsing addict with my own mental health issues and severe PTSD. Now out on the streets in another state without any community support or any leads for proper mental health care, I felt confused and frustrated.

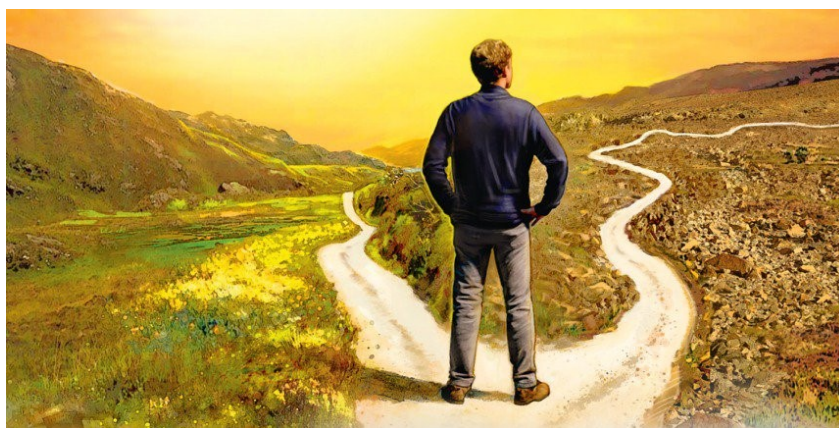
However, I did consider myself very lucky because I came home to a family. The challenges I faced trying to reenter society seemed, at times, insurmountable and scarier than any prison I had ever seen. I say that to say this, I can't imagine if I had to face it alone, as many of my brothers and sisters all across the state have to do on a daily basis. I just may have been part of that high recidivism rate after all.

Even though I had family support, I struggled hard with addiction, depression, shame, and a lot of pain. My life was blessed when I was introduced to peers who had been where I had been and had made all the right connections and had taken all the right steps and made good solid choices. These strong role models, who had re-entered society successfully, were helping others to achieve this success as well.

The road was still hard with many barriers and bumps along the way, but with the right people who knew the right things and had all the right resources, it is more than possible to come home and stay home. I am living proof of that because on January 12, 2017 I celebrated my eighth year of freedom with my wife of 12 years in our home we own with my family and I never thought that possible.

It is so critical for our young men and women coming home from incarceration to know there are resources available to them and know where to look for them. If you don't know where to look for the good, the bad will always have a way of finding you.

The power of strong peers in my life, who had been where I had been and had seen what I had seen and were actually making it in society, made such an impact on me and my life. So much so, I have devoted my life to this very important work. Thank you.



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## STORY OF PERSEVERANCE AND HOPE



**Matt** came to the Waterbury Transitional House (WTH) from prison with a serious conviction and lacked the support system necessary for a successful reentry. He had limited social skills, education and financial support, but nevertheless arrived to the program with a positive attitude and a great deal of motivation.

After about 2 months of residing at our WTH, Matt was feeling defeated as he was unable to find a job and all of his possible housing options had been denied by his Probation Officer. He was facing the possibility of being homeless upon discharge from the program. But with staff encouragement, Matt stayed focused and decided to look into taking online computer classes. He was accepted at a local educational institution and enrolled in classes with the help of financial aid. Matt was excited and ready to begin school, but another roadblock surfaced due to his criminal conviction regarding internet access. It had to be approved by Probation as to where and when Matt could use the Internet. Matt was discouraged and even went so far as to withdraw from the courses. But with additional encouragement from staff, Matt decided to meet with his Probation Officer one more time to try to get his use of the Internet approved, which was necessary for the online classes. This time, Matt was approved and although the time and access was limited, he was able to re-enroll back into school. He was hesitant about the time constraints given the challenge of the classes, but was willing to give it a try. He knew he needed to further his education to attain a better life for himself.

Shortly after beginning school, Matt was able to secure a full-time job with Wendy's. While things were finally looking up for Matt, he was still facing the end of his 90 days at WTH and was worried he would not be able to save enough money in time to secure an apartment. Matt was able to find a room that was approved by Probation, but did not have the money needed to secure it. However, because of Matt's hard work and positive achievements, his Case Manager made a request to our funder for payment of one month's rent along with the security deposit. The request was approved and Matt was able to move into the room and begin his new life in the community.

In summary, Matt enrolled into an educational program and obtained employment and a suitable place to live in less than 90 days, when all the odds were against him, given the nature of his conviction. Matt is now in the process of purchasing a car and doing extremely well in his transition to being a positive member of his community.—**Submitted by Beth Hines, CPA**



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## HAVE YOU FORGIVEN YOURSELF?



Have you forgiven yourself for what you did? What was it? Were you violent? Were you reckless? Were you just plain stupid? Did you stop caring about anything or anyone other than yourself? Do you even really remember what got you in trouble in the first place? While you were away, you probably had a lot of time to think. I know I did. I thought a lot about everything that led up to the worst day of my life, and the subsequent twenty months following it. A lot of time thinking... but not so much time forgiving.

My father was a judge. My mother was a dentist. I was raised right... and yet something went wrong. My pops died before I got into trouble, and I keep saying how happy I was that he couldn't see me behind bars. I couldn't live with the knowledge that I disappointed him so much. I saw it in my mother's eyes, and it killed me. I spent a lot of time thinking about them, and all the other people I disappointed. We ask the world not to judge us by our worst day. We have returned to society looking for a second chance, looking for someone to forgive us. But have you forgiven yourself? Have you told yourself that you are not the monster? Have you told yourself that you are not your worst day... your worst moment? You are asking others, but are you capable of asking yourself for the same thing?

I know, this piece is full of questions, and I have yet to provide any answers. The reason is simple... I don't have any. I don't know how to do what I'm asking. If you do, maybe you can help me with that one. But I do know this... we can't ask others to do something we are not willing to do ourselves. If we don't learn to forgive ourselves, nobody else will either.—**Submitted by John T.**

*Forgiveness*  
is not an occasional act,  
it is a permanent  
*attitude*

- Martin Luther King Jr. -



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## SLUMPS HAPPEN...DEAL WITH IT

Have you ever watched a baseball player who just can't seem to get a hit? Or maybe a basketball star who suddenly can't make a shot? Slumps happen. It happens to them, and it will happen to you. You are out of jail, back in the real world and things seem to be going pretty well. You have a place to live, a job, a strong support system. But then one thing goes wrong... then another. And before you know it you are feeling like the world is crumbling. You're in a slump. Here are some tips to manage it.



**Talk About It** – This isn't a no-hitter where you don't want to jinx the pitcher, it's a slump. So talk about it. Open up to your support system. Let them in on your pain. You probably didn't make it through your sentence alone, so no need to try and do it while you are out. Whether it is a friend, family members, or a therapy group, letting people in on your problems will help you realize that you are not alone.

**Make A Plan** – If you can't hit the ball, maybe it's your stance. If you're missing your shot, maybe you adjust your release point. If things aren't going the way you planned, then come up with a new one. I know myself. When things go wrong, it is easy for me to wallow in the pain. I can't do that... and neither can you. Come up with a plan. Come up with some adjustment to your routine. How are you going to attack this slump? Sometimes just thinking of the plan can be the difference you need to get back on track.

**This Too Shall Pass** – My father would say this. I hated it. Nobody wants to hear that when you are in pain. But in reality, it will. Keep things in perspective. You lost your job? Well, you found one before, you can find one again. Your girlfriend or boyfriend left you? Yeah, it hurts, but it is better than being with someone who doesn't want you. Focus on what you do have, not what you don't. Remember what is really important in your life.



Listen, slumps happen, things are going to go wrong. The tips I gave you aren't going to fix that. If I had the cure to slumps I would be making millions with professional athletes. But instead I am writing this for you. This isn't about the cure, but how you manage it. In sports, all it takes is one ground ball to find its way through the infield for a hit. One little dribbler and you are on base. Slump is over. But until that happens, you have to find your way through it.—

**Submitted by John T.**

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## HOW DO YOU MEASURE A YEAR?



There used to be a Broadway musical called “Rent.” I saw it I think four times. The main question asked was, how do you measure a year? What does five-hundred, twenty-six thousand, six hundred minutes mean to you? I write this on the one year anniversary of my release from prison. I never thought I would ever go, so it is strange to think about the year after getting out. I remember the day I left. Sitting in front of my cube with my mattress rolled up, waiting to be called to the AP room for the final time.

Walking out the front door with a loved one to an awaiting car. Meeting with my probation officer for the first time, feeling overwhelmed by all of the restrictions.

So how do I measure the year? Small victories. The little wins we get on a daily basis. It may be something as small as being able to take a nap in a bed, without having another hundred men around me. Being able to go for a drive. Or maybe going to a movie with a buddy of mine—another restriction being lifted by my P.O. The little things that get me through each day.



But the main way I measure my time out is in the friends and loved ones I still have. It is easy to think of all the stuff you have lost. The people who left you. But you are out... it is time to move forward. So now I think about the people who stuck by my side when I was away, and who rushed to greet me upon my release. The ones who refused to judge me based on my worst day, and who refuse to let me do the same to myself. Maybe that Broadway show was right. Perhaps the true way to measure a year... is in love.—Submitted by John T.



## CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

### BRIDGEPORT

Dan Braccio, [braccio@careerresources.org](mailto: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](mailto:sgunderman@qvcc.edu) &  
Aileen O'Connor, [aoconnor@csimail.org](mailto: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

To Be Determined

### NEW HAVEN

Clifton Graves, [cgraves@newhavenct.gov](mailto:cgraves@newhavenct.gov)  
Bill Dyson, [dysonwilliam@att.net](mailto:dysonwilliam@att.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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:jscrapchansky@qvcc.edu)

Quinebaug Valley Community College  
742 Upper Maple Street, Danielson, CT

4th Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.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](mailto:sgunderman@qvcc.edu) or  
(860) 932-4090.