

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Building Bridges: Reframed Conference



It's been a bit over a month now since an electric crowd packed CCSU's Welte Hall for a conversation with "The New Jim Crow" author, Michelle Alexander. The following day, bolstered by the energy of the previous evening, hundreds gathered for the Building Bridges: Reframed conference, eager to meet with colleagues and friends to discuss current reform efforts and next steps for Connecticut.

It was an exciting two days; but the latest Building Bridges conference almost did not happen. Like many others impacted by state budget, the IMRP has experienced a significant cut in funding these past few fiscal years. Down staff, it did not seem pragmatic to host a conference this year while simultaneously trying to fulfill project duties. We entered the winter fully anticipating to hold off on hosting something this year.

Then we found out some CCSU students secured Michelle Alexander for a campus talk in February. How could we not bring folks to campus for that? And how could we not follow it with a Building Bridges conference? Despite our initial hesitations, if ever there felt a need to gather folks together, trade notes, inspire and engage each other, it was at this particular moment in time — a time when so much swings in the balance in our state and across the nation. Now a month removed from the events, I can unequivocally state that I'm glad we made the decision to go ahead with the conference.

This past year has seen turbulence across the spectrum of American politics. Not immune from this instability, criminal justice policy stands at crossroads as well. As a narrowing of viewpoints and perspectives translates into a greater sense of us vs. them, many dread the return of a mindset that played on fear and laid the path towards the hyper-incarceration of American black, brown and impoverished individuals paved with the reckless spending of public resources for a perceived sense of safety.

If ever an antidote was created for such an infestation of the public sphere, it was showcased in those two days at CCSU. Bookended by the enthusiasm of both the new and seasoned political activists, buttressed by the wisdom of Ms. Alexander and those most intimately impacted by the system, and surrounded by dedicated colleagues, an alternate path was laid out for all to witness: truth, honesty, inclusivity, education, collaboration, connectedness and a fierce commitment to the democratic ideals of an engaged and informed electorate.

It was in those two days, and indeed in many singular events that have preceded and followed it, that we can peer down into our future and see an even brighter path for justice reform: one which respects the dignity of all humans, regardless of circumstances. As Bill Dyson conveyed to us an old saying at Welte that night: "No one goes through this world alone, what goes out to the life of others, comes back to our own." The collective response from those two days was inspirational. But as Ms. Alexander reminded us, we cannot be lulled into apathy. The ups and downs of budgets and political shouting matches should not deter those fighting for justice from the ultimate prize: a day when there is no them, only us.

**Come keep the momentum alive at CT Reentry Reform day at the State Capitol on April 25th.**

Demand dignity for all as we collectively come together as voters, engaged citizens and the voices of those impacted by the justice system. More at [www.ctreentry.org](http://www.ctreentry.org).

Please also visit the Building Bridges: Reframed site for videos and pictures from the conference: <http://www.ccsu.edu/imrp/events/BuildingBridges2018.html> — **Andrew Clark, Director of Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy**



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Reflections ...



CT Reentry Voices interviewed Dan Braccio as he gets ready to start a new chapter in his life. Our reentry community is eternally grateful for your dedication and commitment to changing the lives of so many individuals who have found themselves part of the criminal justice system.

**CT REENTRY VOICES:** *Start out with reflections / overview of career as it relates to reentry.*

**DAN BRACCIO:** I moved to Connecticut in May 1986 working in a very different job than the one I ended up in. In December 1989, I was hired as a case worker at the CO-OP Multiservice Center, a program of The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, Inc., which had been founded in 1973. CO-OP was an acronym for Community Outside Opportunities Program. Our office on Main Street in Bridgeport was bordered on one side by the DOC Supervised Home Release (SHR) office and on the other by CSSD Probation office. Needless to say, it was always a busy corner with people often going out one door and in the next. For the better part of the next fifteen years, CO-OP Center, as it became known, was always in a downtown Bridgeport location which meant there was a lot of foot traffic to our door. We provided essential services for returning ex-offenders as they were known at the time. Assistance with obtaining legal identification, public transportation assistance, housing assistance (at the YMCA when possible, but sometimes at sketchy rooming houses), employment referrals, used clothing assistance, and, of course, counseling, drug treatment referrals, and occasional rides to appointments. Along with our one court referral case worker, the reentry staff assisted 800 -1,000 clients annually. CO-OP Center progressed into the new millennium, eventually losing its direct service CSSD contract, and expanded its direct service mission to include GED preparation and computer and financial literacy. I became the program director in January 2002 and led a smaller but highly dedicated staff of four which had approximately 60 years of reentry service experience among them. In 2007, CO-OP Center became a member of the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative, created by Scott Wilderman of Career Resources and Steve Lanza of Family ReEntry, and I agreed to become the co-chair at the fourth meeting. In 2016, along with a number of other state providers, we lost our funding from CT DOC and by the end of that June, CO-OP Center ceased to exist. I was fortunate enough to be asked by Scott Wilderman, President and CEO of Career Resources, Inc. in Bridgeport to work for his agency, and I worked there as the Director of Community and Business Relations until my retirement in January 2018.

**CT REENTRY VOICES:** *For the last decade, you have been an integral part of reentry in the Greater Bridgeport region as well as statewide. What are some of your greatest accomplishments/successes?*

**DAN BRACCIO:** Well, I would think that the longevity of the Bridgeport Reentry Roundtable itself would probably be right up near the top on the list of successes. It was a testament to Scott Wilderman and Steve Lanza's initial vision of people coming to work together instead of in siloes that made the roundtable an attractive entity. And, there was no way that they, or I, or anyone else would have guessed that we would meet consecutively for 121 months before finally taking a summer off! The relationships that were built between local agencies, as well as the relationships between local providers and state agencies, were definitely of great mutual value, I believe. Also, the development of six other reentry councils around the state by people who attended the Bridgeport meetings and then replicated the model in their communities was a great accomplishment. And, I would have to add here how instrumental the leadership of Liz Dupont-Diehl, who was Bridgeport's co-chair during those years, was to that expansion. It's powerful to be able to point to the different areas of the state and to say these are local providers who are working together for solutions to challenges that exist across the state for people returning home from incarceration. I think that there is even greater potential this year, now that the New Britain and Windham County councils have been reconstituted, to work toward a greater awareness of the need for more criminal justice reform, and I understand that there will be a reentry legislative education day on Wednesday, April 25 in Hartford.

For the Bridgeport Roundtable, a number of other highlights come to mind including the Ban the Box legislation that was passed in Bridgeport in the Fall of 2009, several months before it was passed statewide. Nadine Nevins of Bridgeport's CT Legal Services office was the driving force behind this and authored the ordinance that eventually was enacted. Two 3-year federal contracts from DOJ and DOL were awarded to Career Resources and Family ReEntry to form a collaboration with other roundtable agencies that created employment opportunities for reentering citizens which was very successful. The roundtable initiated and hosted six annual Reentry Awards Ceremonies that highlighted the accomplishments of successful former offenders as well as the community professionals, advocates, employers, and agencies that supported successful reentry efforts. So many other efforts that resulted from the work of individuals and agencies that wanted to move the criminal justice reform agenda ahead happened during my last ten years with the Bridgeport Roundtable. I would be remiss in failing to mention, though, that one of the greatest successes of our roundtable, and one which all of the roundtables duplicate, is providing a non-judgmental platform that gives a voice to those former offenders who have returned home and have much to share with us from their lived experience. Our meetings were always open to those who were simply looking for help or who wanted to share their frustration or offer encouragement to others coming home. We are truly blessed with a passionate and compassionate community of providers who, I believe, sincerely enjoy meeting and working together. (Continued...)

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Reflections Continued...



**CT REENTRY VOICES:** *Connecticut has been a Second Chance Society for the past few years and has reformed many criminal justice policies. What is your hope for the future of reentry and criminal justice reform here in CT?*

**DAN BRACCIO:** I think that it's been a point of pride for so many of us in the criminal justice field that Connecticut has been recognized as a leader in creating and enacting smart on crime policies, especially in the last several years. We have been extremely fortunate to have had the leadership of CT DOC Commissioner Scott Semple with his vision of a more rehabilitative model of incarceration and release, and Governor Malloy and his staff, notably Michael Lawlor, who have championed legislation

that has brought Connecticut recognition as an innovator. The state's Sentencing Commission and OPM's CJ PAC have brought together enlightened thinkers and activists who have had a great influence on the legislature and the kinds of laws that contribute to a more just state without impacting public safety. So, while we can feel justifiably proud of how far we have come, there is the need to be vigilant in maintaining the progress achieved and then building on that, especially in what may be a pivotal election year. Those seeking public office should be queried about their commitment to current criminal justice reforms, and educated with facts about the savings to the state and taxpayers which these reforms and those which are proposed will produce. Everyone is aware that Connecticut is in difficult financial straits. We have seen in the past two years how this has affected the criminal justice community with the loss of cost-efficient and effective programs and, in some cases, entire agencies. My hope is that remaining provider agencies will resist the temptation to circle the wagons concentrating on their own survival, and will instead seek out more opportunities to collaborate with other community agencies both inside and outside the reentry circle. The overlaps with housing, health care, and education providers for the population we serve offer some interesting hybrid projects which will expand the success of reentry efforts. Certainly because we cannot look to the state for adequate funding, other bridges to private and community foundations which share the vision of more just and equitable opportunities for all must be built. Also, I would very much like to see a greater engagement of those successful former offenders in our communities to emerge as leaders at the tables where decisions are being made about policies and practices which will affect those who are still incarcerated. I think we are looking at several more challenging years ahead.

**CT REENTRY VOICES:** *What advice do you have for those individuals who will be returning home and those of us working in this field today?*

**DAN BRACCIO:** I've told many groups that I initially took the job of a reentry case worker because I needed a job at that time, and never intended to stay longer than 6 months. I stayed 28 years. Part of that was due to the profound respect I developed for the men and women who sat down in my office and, without an ID, or bus fare, or a high school education, or professional clothing, persisted in their goal to put their past behind them and concentrate on their future. The odds were definitely stacked against them, but they persisted. What a wonderful lesson to be schooled in for 28 years! And for those who were successful, there was almost always the desire to give back to their community which they felt they had harmed and were now looking to heal. So, for those people waiting to come home, I would recommend that they work with any and every program available while they're on the inside. When they return, they shouldn't delay in contacting the remaining reentry agencies that can provide additional services to help make reentry less of a bumpy ride. Parole and Probation officers have become solid partners in referring their clients to these agencies. Also, the network of successful former offenders should be waiting to welcome these men and women home and give them the hope and encouragement that they need. Many agencies are still active in pre-release work and that has proven very effective in creating long lasting relationships. Hartford, Waterbury, New Haven, and Bridgeport have created reentry welcome centers that provide a starting point for the connection to the most needed services.

For those still working in this field, I say a sincere, "Thank you!" Your generous spirits and compassion for folks who have been marginalized and stigmatized are what makes your work that much more meaningful and effective. Don't lose that heart. Certainly, there will be no shortage of people seeking services from you, so be patient, take all of your vacation days, and stay healthy.

**CT REENTRY VOICES:** *What's next for you?*

**DAN BRACCIO:** Pretty simply, it will be to relocate south of CT in the coming months and start my next chapter somewhere far from my base for the last three decades. I am reducing clutter at home but, fortunately, all the wonderful memories of people I have worked side by side with in CT won't take up any extra room in the truck. I've been blessed in knowing so many of you. Keep up the great work you are doing! Bye for now! Peace.





# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## HangTime...Real Talk with Respect

HangTime is off to an amazing start of the new year, continuing to assist the reintegration of men and women leaving incarceration into the community and the workforce.

What is even more important to us is that we provide individuals a safe space where they feel they are respected and their voices are heard. We encourage "Real Talk with Respect" and create an environment where everyone can contribute and be part of something positive. We provide mentoring, education, and foster opportunities for in person social networking.

In the month of January, we have been able to host and service an average of 30 guests per week discussing a variety of topics including diverse subjects in history, science, local, state, national and international news, issues of race relations, social consciousness issues, and politics. We have had the pleasure of hosting a number of speakers as well:

Yvrose Romulus, a representative from the University of Bridgeport, who discussed education opportunities, FASFA loans, credit for learning, and gave words of encouragement to those hoping to pursue their education. She also gave some personal information on her Haitian background and her journey to success in the United States.

HangTime allows college students to attend and participate in our sessions. This month students from Yale University and local professional clinicians participated in our spirited discussions.

Carmen Nieves, Program Manager from YouthBuild, introduced the program to our attendees as an alternative based education program for at-risk-youth ages 18-24 that provides job training in construction trades, leadership opportunities, and ways to connect to their communities.

Our very own Byron Bigelow, hosted a "Reptile Night", bringing in and teaching everyone about a number of different species of reptiles including Pythons, Boa Constrictors, Uromastix and a Columbian Tegu.

Here at HangTme, you are guaranteed, a hot meal, access to donated clothing, toiletries, current job listings, new knowledge, and social service provider information. Most importantly, HangTime offers a safe zone despite where you come from in the community, and a sense of family.



# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## “Mirror, Mirror”

Today, I discovered something.  
 It inhabits one space but only when I'm near  
 Why stare at me with confliction?  
 I look back with admiration of its complexity,  
 Fixed on its eyes.  
 I see loathing and indecision  
 So I stand there. Stuck in time. Stapled to the ground.  
 My questions answer still a mystery.  
 It judges me but it's no better.  
 In fact, its movements mimic my own,  
 Until I walk away.  
 I watch it disappear into the borders that surround it  
 And I know I won.  
 I'm amused because I know its desperate desire  
 The only thing it lacks that I do have...  
 Freedom.  
 So I smile a sec, then panic for ten  
 Just as something hits me.  
 We only exist as long as the other.  
 We are two in the same.  
 I'm sad at the thought. Then sad for It.  
 How I understand the state of confliction.  
 How He will never truly experience freedom...

**Poem by Jazreel V.**

21 year old, recently released after spending five years in prison.  
 Participated in Skills of Socialization (S.O.S.) program at Osborn.

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## A Young Man's Journey



My name is **Raleigh L.** and I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut; however, at only a few weeks old, I was sent to Mobile, Alabama to live with my father and grandmother. I had a very good upbringing down south. At the age of 21, I came back to Bridgeport in 2010 to visit my mother and siblings. During my visit, I found myself in unfamiliar territory and got caught up in the street life which led to my incarceration, not only once, but three times.

Upon my most recent release in early 2017, I made a decision to change my life for the better. I was introduced to Mr. Hughes who is a counselor at Isiah House and a STRIVE graduate himself. Mr. Hughes told me about the STRIVE program and the positive impact it had on his life. Even though I was skeptical about the STRIVE program and how it could help me, I immediately signed up. It was the best decision I have made in a long time.

During my first week as a STRIVE student, I felt uncomfortable and out of place. As the weeks passed, I began meeting new people. In particular, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who have played a major role in keeping me focused, especially when I was feeling down. From that point on, I made the decision to keep moving forward. I believe I can accomplish anything that comes my way.

Now 29, I was hired to work at Career Resources Inc. after completing the STRIVE program. I am currently working toward attaining my GED then plan on furthering my education in the Human Services field. My advice to the young men and women looking to find their way would be to always give it your all in everything you do...every little step counts.

**“If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.**

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Choices and Consequences



My name is **Rich** and I am an addict. I am also a father, son, brother, husband and friend. I am 43 years old. My first addiction was money and the fast life. I thought I had it all figured out; “hustling” I had the money, the cars, and the women, a real life movie, so I thought. Living this life style, incarceration was definitely acceptable to me - and so was death.

During a transaction in 2001, I was shot and prescribed Oxycontin. Prescription drugs to heroin, this was just the beginning of a story that way too many of us are familiar with. In 2003, my identity changed to an inmate number. Due to my choices, I caused a lot of damage to my children and family. When you do time, your loved ones do the time with you. I tried to cope with all the pain and damage I caused by hustling. This always led me back to using drugs which, without a doubt, led me back to prison. In and out, always trying to find a better way...my way.

Until one day, I’m serving the shortest time in my life at the (TOP) Time Out Program at CRCI and learned that my two-year old son had been removed from his mother by DCF for the second time. I feel that this program provided me with some tools that I carry with me to this day. At this point, I accepted that I was defeated and surrendered to the disease of addiction. I wanted to fight to live and have a better life. It is all about choices and what I was willing to sacrifice at that time to be able to create into reality later in life. I was released on special parole into the Cheney House, a 90-day work release program. I chose to use (MAT) medication-assisted treatment (Vivitrol), which I was introduced to at CRCI, for five months as a temporary transitional crutch. I participated in IOP, relapse prevention, cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy, and individual therapy. I also had a Recovery Specialist and I went to Narcotics Anonymous, and yes, I actually went to the meetings this time, at least five times a week. While I was at CRCI, I was also introduced to an option to become a Recovery Coach through CCAR, and came to find out ATR would assist in financing my education. I did this all from the Cheney House for a year by choice. I visited with my son every weekend and worked a full-time job. I was making changes in my choices, so my life was changing. DCF referred me to The Connection, Inc. for housing assistance. I now have full custody of my son and a great career helping addicts as a Recovery Coach in a MAT program.

Someone once told me if I could give up something so small, I would gain something so big! Thanks. Love Life.— **Rich W.**





## CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

### BRIDGEPORT

Rob Hebert, [hebert@careerresources.org](mailto:hebert@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, [cthireone@gmail.com](mailto:cthireone@gmail.com)

CT Nonprofits  
75 Charter Oak Avenue, Bldg. 1, Hartford, CT

1st Thursday, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

### NEW BRITAIN

Dana Smith, [dsmith@advocacyunlimited.org](mailto:dsmith@advocacyunlimited.org)

CCSU/IMRP  
185 Main Street, New Britain, CT

2nd Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

### NEW HAVEN

Earl Bloodworth, [ebloodworth@newhavenct.gov](mailto:ebloodworth@newhavenct.gov)

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)

The Connections, Inc.  
101 Water Street, 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 REGION

Denise Keane, [denise.keane@perceptionprograms.org](mailto:denise.keane@perceptionprograms.org)

Generations Family Health Center  
40 Mansfield Avenue, Willimantic, CT

3rd Tuesday, 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.



If you would like more information  
or would like to submit an article for  
our next newsletter, please contact

Sue Gunderman at  
[cthireone@gmail.com](mailto:cthireone@gmail.com)

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE