

## JDPP Documentary Captures a Vision of Freedom through the Arts

The Judy Dworin Performance Project (JDPP) celebrated the release of the documentary “Making Me Whole: Prison, Art & Healing” with a festive reception and premiere screening at the Hartford Public Library on October 5, 2017. More than 200 supporters attended the event including Governor Dannel Malloy and First Lady Cathy Malloy, Connecticut Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple, Department of Economic and Community Development Director of Culture Kristina Newman-Scott as well as numerous friends, funders and returning citizens.

The partnership production with Connecticut Public Television featured JDPP’s Bridging Boundaries program and was made possible through the Creativity Connects, National Demonstration Project grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mid-America Arts Alliance, New England Foundation for the Arts and the Department of Economic and Community Development: Connecticut Office of the Arts. The highly competitive grant focused on how the arts can collaborate with non-arts partners to create change. Since 2005, Bridging Boundaries has coupled social work with the uniquely introspective and metamorphic power of the arts to bridge the forced separations of populations affected by incarceration. The work began with performance residencies for women at York Correctional Institution; then outreached to York Moms and their children and youth throughout the Greater Hartford region who have parents in prison; and in 2016, became an integral component of Governor Malloy’s Second Chance Society initiatives at the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center. The program’s foundational strength has also supported New Beginnings and Stepping Out which bring program continuity and support to returning citizens in the community. Social work support from Families in Crisis, Community Partners in Action Resettlement Program, the Hartford Public Schools and the Connecticut Department of Correction completes the transformational capacity of the program, ensuring that participants have the resources they need to process the challenges they courageously face and move forward. In the words of DECD Director of Culture Kristina Newman-Scott, “...they (JDPP) were doing this work before it became fashionable.”

Emmy award winning Director John O’Neill and his crew beautifully crafted the documentary which included rare footage from behind the walls of Connecticut’s prisons. In the words of Executive Director Judy Dworin, “The level of collaboration, cooperation, and dedication represented in this project is unprecedented and so very moving. Each individual, whether a provider or a participant, has been a visionary in this work. It is our hope that through this documentary this model will be more widely known and help others who are healing from the broad impact of incarceration.”

The documentary may be viewed in its entirety through this link: <https://cptv.org/making-me-whole/>



Left to Right: Kathy Cardoso, Social Worker Hartford Public Schools; Kathy Bortek Gersten, JDPP Associate Artistic Director; Judy Dworin, JDPP Executive and Artistic Director; and Karen Jones, Marketing and Communications Manager

## Commissioner's Corner

It is hard to believe that we are down to the final two months of 2017. I thought this would be a good time, before everyone gets caught up in the frenetic pace of the holiday season, to reflect on some of the Department of Corrections accomplishments over the past year.

Thanks in part to the Risk Reduction Earned Credit Program (which incentivizes inmates with days off their sentences for good behavior and participation in prison programs and activities), the incarcerated population continues to decline at a steady pace. Currently there are approximately 1,000 fewer offenders housed state facilities compared to this time last year.

Undoubtedly one of the most exciting developments this past year, after much hard work and planning, was the opening in March of the Young Offenders Unit within the Cheshire Correctional Institution. Born from a visit to prisons in Germany, and aided by research showing that the brain is not fully developed until the age of 25, the Young Offender Unit or TRUE Unit houses 70 young offenders and an additional 12 older inmates who act as “mentors” to the young “mentees.” The program includes work on, among other things: conflict resolution, life skills, educational assistance, and team-building exercises.

In the first eight months of the unit's existence, there have only been a few incidents; a remarkable statistic considering this age group constitutes approximately 10 percent of the overall prison population, but is responsible for 25 percent of the disciplinary incidents. The success of the Young Offender Unit at Cheshire has led to plans for expanding the program at the Cheshire facility, along with the opening (in March of 2018) of a similar unit for women at the York Correctional Institution.

On the subject of female offenders, we have intensified our efforts to reduce the female population by 25%, commensurate with the similar reduction achieved among the male population.

Another exciting project that is gaining momentum is the Connecticut Statewide Recidivism Reduction Initiative. With the help of a grant of \$1.0 million from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the five-year goal of the project is to reduce the recidivism rate by 31% in the parole population; by 51% in the young adult population; and by 51% in the statewide population. The initiative's primary focus will be on a collaborative reentry process supported by individualized case planning, evidence-based assessment and programming, as well as supervision before and after release from incarceration to insure both accountability and the opportunity for a successful reentry for all returning individuals.

In terms of accomplishments, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Agency's collaboration with Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield. The college was chosen as one of 67 institutions of higher learning from across the nation to participate in the Second Chance Pell pilot program which has resulted in offenders traveling to the school to take state-of-the-art manufacturing classes.

I am proud of what this agency has been able to accomplish, thanks to the hardworking correctional professionals of the Department of Correction and despite severe budgetary restrictions, over the course of this past year.

However, our work is by no means done, we will continue to work collaboratively to find new and innovative ways to prepare offenders for successful reintegration into their communities. I can hardly wait to see what the New Year has in store. – **Connecticut Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple**

## Living Life on Life's Terms

A few years ago, going through all kinds of stuff as I came home from incarceration, I realized that everything had been structured inside. When I came home, all that was gone, and I was living by my own rules. My last time incarcerated, I saw how we were treated, and I made a decision to do my best to be a law abiding citizen and not return.

I started job searching the day after I came home, and applied to about 100 jobs in a month. Job searching sucks. I finally got hooked up with a landscaping job through my case manager at Sober Solutions, who I was referred to through my reentry counselor at Osborn. At Sober Solutions, they drug tested me, trusted me, and referred me to the job. I then landed a restaurant job through a referral from someone I did time with. I worked my butt off, and the chef gave me more hours. Now I'm there full-time, making pretty good money.

I was homeless, but grateful for a roof over my head. I was on the streets for about 16 months when McKinney Shelter directed me toward a program to help homeless people get housing. I did all they asked of me, and I'm now in my own apartment. I would pick up litter and pull weeds outside my building, because I take pride in where I live. The landlord saw me doing this and offered me a job as the Super at the building, so now I have a side job there.

I've learned that you can grieve while moving forward. I've learned that you need to suck up your pride and ask for help. There are people out there who are concerned about your best interests, so find those people and get the help you need. — **Jay**



## My Journey Thus Far

I want to first thank you for giving me the opportunity to write something on the eventful journey I have been on since my incarceration. I am learning and adapting to a lot of things out here. I would first say that I'm enjoying my freedom that I willfully gave up 33 ½ years ago. A lot has changed over the years starting with essentials such food, clothing, and medical. I can remember when landlines were very popular with their unique attachments. Now, you must carry your phone everywhere you go to stay in contact with any and everybody.

Housing is another obstacle to endure if you don't know the (ins and outs) basic rules. It was hard at first because I have a criminal history that hindered me from getting into a lot of places, but fortunately after being homeless for some time and being persistent by hitting the pavement, I found a place that was reasonable and affordable. Family didn't fully embrace me until recently. I attended a family outing at Wickham Park, a beautiful place I might add, and it was an opportunity to reacquaint with them because we were strangers due to my years of incarceration.

Getting work was another never-ending struggle, not only because of my past, but also the comradery, ethics and financial responsibilities that are associated with holding a steady job. I've been out of practice and out of touch. People not only don't know you, but gaining their trust takes a lot of hard work, dedication, and persistence. Holding a job in prison doesn't compare with holding a job out here. I have a lot to say but I'll end by saying this, "The air out here is more soothing to the mind, body, and spirit than the air inside." - **Lawrence W.**

## Ceremonial Bill Signing



On August 2, 2017, Governor Malloy held a ceremonial bill signing of HB 7044, an Act Concerning Pretrial Justice Reform along with eight other criminal justice reform bills at the Faith Congregational Church in Hartford. He was surrounded by Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin, Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple, Under Secretary for Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Mike Lawlor, members of ACLU of Connecticut, Yankee Institute for Public Policy, local leaders, legislators, and community stakeholders. These bills continue to transform Connecticut's criminal justice system.

### The other bills included:

SB 963, An Act Concerning Educational And Environmental Issues Relating To Manufacturing.

SB 1022, An Act Establishing A Pilot Program To Provide Enhanced Community Services To Those In The Criminal Justice System.

HB 5764, An Act Concerning The Licensing Of Barbers And Hairdressers.

HB 6219, An Act Concerning Community Reentry By Persons Who Were Incarcerated.

HB 7131, An Act Expediting Child Support Modification Orders For Incarcerated Or Institutionalized Obligor.

HB 7146, An Act Requiring A Criminal Conviction For Certain Offenses Before Assets Seized In A Lawful Arrest Or Lawful Search May Be Forfeited In A Civil Proceeding.

HB 7284, An Act Concerning State Identification For Inmates Upon Reentry.

HB 7302 (PA 17-239), An Act Concerning Isolated Confinement And Correctional Staff Training And Wellness.

## We are all Someone's . . . "But it's You"

I recently sat at my friend's home playing with her daughter. I have known the family for roughly ten years, they are more than friends, they like to say we are "family." Yes, it means that the friend has evolved into family. I used to work with the husband for years. We became best friends while playing company softball. I have had lunch many times with his wife, acted as a surrogate shopping buddy. I squatted as a catcher for the oldest child while he warmed up his pitching arm and played dozens of board games with their daughter. This family supported me when I first got in trouble. They supported me while I was away... sending me pictures, cards, answering phone calls, even visiting me while I was at Cheshire. Their support never wavered, even when my own beliefs did. Upon my release, they made sure I wasn't alone. Nearly two years later, I am lucky enough to still be able to call them "family."

But I asked the mother, "Did you ever think you would have a felon sitting on your sofa, playing with your daughter?" "No" "If someone like me moved in next door, would you be all right with that?" "Well, I would want to see what their situation was, what exactly was the crime, see about their rehabilitation..." That was a very politically correct answer. "Seriously, you would do all of that? Come on... that sounds very progressive. But wouldn't you really just grab your pitch fork just like everyone else." "Maybe... but John, it's you."

Everyone is someone's "it's you." I think if more of the public thought about ex-offenders that way, things would be a lot easier for that segment of the population. We tend to be looked at as monsters, damaged goods, the bad guys. Now, not everyone sees us that way, but unfortunately, that is the reality. If you went to jail, you must have done something really bad to deserve it. But that person, that human who made the mistake, to someone special, "it's you." They know who you really are... they know the mistake doesn't define you as a person. If only more people thought that way. — John T.



## Getting Through the Pardon Process

Project Fresh Start's Jordan Johnson said the person who is successful in completing the pardon's process is the person who is persistent.

"They're the ones who don't give up when things are taking too long and not done on their time," he said. "When they face a challenge and they feel it's too hard and life happens and things come up, they don't give up. The people who get it are the people who want to get this taken care of and get this done."



Pardon sessions are held at New Haven City Hall every other Wednesday from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. People who are serious about pursuing a pardon get the hard facts about the pardon process—a four month or more process that involves filling out an application, obtaining one's criminal record for all crimes and jurisdictions, fingerprinting, and possibly a trip to the state's pardon board wherever in the state it might be meeting. They also learn about the state's certificate of employability, which can help with some of the barriers that felons face when applying for jobs.

The applicant gets step-by-step help from Johnson and the rest of the Project Fresh Start staff to both properly fill out the application and write the required essays. The essays are part of the process of just getting the pardons board to consider the application, which can be a barrier itself for felons with limited education.

"It must be five years from your last felony and three years from your last misdemeanor for you to apply," Johnson said. You also must have successfully completed your sentence, and not be under state supervision.

"Some states operate differently. In Massachusetts, if it's been 10 years since your last crime and you've remained crime-free during that decade, you can obtain an automatic pardon," Jordan said. Connecticut has been making some strides toward reforming and streamlining its pardons process, and advocates continue to push to reduce barriers to reentry for the formerly incarcerated. "Coming here," he said of Project Fresh Start, "is the reason why I was so confident. It is because of the way they treated me here and how they tell you step-by-step, at each of the four steps. They teach you here. They check it for you and make sure it's done right—that builds confidence, so I'll tell people don't give up do it, let this place help you." — **Jordan Johnson, Project Fresh Start**



## One Song . . . Glory

In this life we can be judged by a lot of different things. How much money you have, how many people you helped along your path, how far you can hit a baseball. A lot of them are really arbitrary. I mean, you can be the richest man in the world, and still be a jerk. You can be the most philanthropic person anyone has ever met, and be homeless. You can hit a baseball 500 feet, and have nobody really give a damn. When you are coming out of prison, you often feel like you are being judged on your worst day, the worst part of your life. You may have a killer résumé, but nobody sees it because you have an inmate number. Not going to lie, at times it feels like it is tattooed on my forehead. The worst part of it all, is at times I feel like I am the one bringing it up. You have friends, colleagues who don't care about your prison sentence, and yet you are the one walking around with this chip on your shoulder. I know I do. I do everything I can to get rid of it, yet it remains.

I had the killer résumé. I had the great jobs, the life that I thought I wanted. It's gone. Now I am starting over. Starting over from inside a hole of my own making and I am just trying for a little bit of redemption. One song... glory...one thing to leave behind. Isn't that really what it's all about? Doing that one thing you can be proud of before time runs out on the clock.

The only problem is how do I do it? Is it through mentoring? Is it that book that you are having such a hard time writing? What is it that I can do to make all of this worth it? While I was away, I tutored everyone I could. I tried to make my time actually mean something. I told myself that if I can help one person get their GED... if I can take this horrible situation and help make one person better because of it, then maybe, just maybe there is a silver lining to it.

The silver lining has come and gone. Now the real world is barking at my door and I am not sure how to answer. I thought I had this figured out... and maybe I failed to follow my own previous advice and got cocky. Hubris really is one of the deadliest of sins. Never again. I have learned my lesson, I am as humble as when it all first began. When you are in a hole, that is where you start to dig... at the beginning. All for that one shot... one song... on the chance to leave something behind. — **John T.**

### RELEASED INMATE

### QUICK TIPS

**MAKE A GOAL FOR WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE NOW THAT YOU ARE OUT**

**KEEP A DIARY OF YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES**

**GO TO YOUR LOCAL RELIGIOUS HOUSE OF WORSHIP AND ASK FOR HELP**

**GO TO CITY/TOWN HALL AND ASK FOR THE TOWN'S REENTRY ORGANIZATIONS**

**FIND ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR AREA TO HELP YOU/FOOD BANK, CLOTHING, ID**

**FIND SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO USE THE INTERNET**

**ASK FOR A REENTRY DIRECTORY FROM YOUR SUPERVISORY AGENCY/OR LOOK UP ON INTERNET**

**LOCATE A REENTRY ROUNDTABLE IN YOUR AREA**

Submitted by: Barry Diamond, P.R.I.D.E. Program

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

## Path of Perseverance

The feeling one has when it dawns upon them the moment has come, freedom from physical incarceration, happens to be, for me anyway, one of the happiest experiences of my life. So, to comprehend my transition back into the free world in these United States of America, it may take a while to describe. I'm ashamed to admit that living the reality of being totally dependent on anyone else, other than myself, has been difficult.



Immediately upon release, the only possessions I claimed as my own were a few notebooks and a plan. The discipline I acquired and applied accordingly ensured that I would never put myself in that position again. To say that it takes commitment to not regress...is an understatement and would be a fatal mistake. However, I have been lucky to stumble across employment within weeks of being released.

Yes, I've been incarcerated more than once. So, it takes more than just a simple commitment to even stand a fighting chance...no it's deeper than that. Dedication to my own awareness, paired with determination to want/need more of myself, whatever it may be, and inwardly feeling as if I were put here on this Earth to do more than my current status, like maybe I can change a person's life or perhaps their perspective of it, has had a profound effect on me. Ever present, like your shadow, forever a friend so long as there is light...was SOMETHING words will not allow myself to express as I decipher my reasons for not giving up at the lowest of low points in my existence.

Perseverance blessed me with the wisdom to combat those thought patterns which rerouted the pain to manifest opposite thoughts in my subconscious. Armed with the confidence of knowing who I am, I remind myself I can accomplish whatever I put my mind to. I set out every day with the right mindset to create and maintain positive change in my life. Sprinkle in help and support from the most unexpected people and you have my account of my experiences which bring you to where I am today...free from physical incarceration. – **Nathan R.**

"Confidence."  
- is something you  
create within yourself  
by believing in who  
YOU are.

### CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

#### BRIDGEPORT

Dan Braccio, [braccio@careerresources.org](mailto:braccio@careerresources.org) or  
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

To Be Determined

#### NEW HAVEN

Clifton Graves, [cgraves@newhavenct.gov](mailto:cgraves@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 COUNTY

To Be Determined

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE



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)

