

# Reentry Begins At Reception

## 2018 REENTRY WRAP UP

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Statewide Reentry Newsletter

### Reentrant Highlight...

#### Loving Relationships Can Change a Reentrant's World

By Janet Kelley, Special Assistant to the Secretary

Steve Cave described himself as a hateful, angry, racist and violent person. In prison, he repeatedly assaulted corrections officers, Cave admitted, including trying to kill one with a homemade knife.

He fell into the juvenile system at 13 after running away from an abusive home in Philadelphia. A few years later, after the armed robbery of a convenience store, Cave was sentenced to state prison. His sentence lengthened after attacking the corrections officers. He had not had a visit for nearly 20 years, Cave said, when Cindy Sanford from the Pennsylvania Prison Society came to see him in prison. Cave wanted nothing to do with her, but said he agreed to meet her, only as a favor to another inmate. Mrs. Sanford asked him to sit down and talk about his life. She offered to visit him. She offered to be his friend. The kindness of a stranger, Cave recently told reporter Michael Lester of the Bloomsburg Press-Enterprise, turned his life around. It motivated him to learn to read, improve his speech and his behavior. He became a peer counselor to help other inmates and started taking classes.

Last December, Cave, now 36, was released from SCI Mahanoy. After a brief stay at a Harrisburg area community corrections center, he went to live with Mrs. Sanford and her husband, Keith, outside Mifflinville, Columbia County. Mrs. Sanford said she knows some inmates are beyond reform and told the newspaper reporter that she extensively vetted Cave before inviting him into her home. But, she added, during the three years she visited him in prison, Cave underwent a "dramatic transformation," and she saw his potential. "She is the first human being that ever gave me love and showed me how to love. I never had love. She stuck with me. Love is love," Cave said.

Cave is volunteering at AGAPE in Bloomsburg, with the hope of mentoring other current or former inmates. Together, Cave and Mrs. Sanford are planning to launch a volunteer program through Bloomsburg-based AGAPE to train area men and women to help reentrants adjust to life outside prison. "When somebody loves you, it's enough to change your world," Cave said.



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## **From The Desk of The Secretary**

While I know many of you have heard this before, I'm going to say it again...

**“Ninety percent of incarcerated individuals will return home one day.”**



We don't just say this for the sake of saying it, we say it because it is the truth.

Many of these individuals will be living in our communities among us. Because of that, I want corrections, which involves prison and parole staff, to ensure that while individuals are under our supervision they are provided with treatment programs, educational/vocational programs and reentry services so they can learn/use skills that will set them on the path to success once released from prison.

Everyone in society should want and support this goal of reentrants obtaining and keeping life-sustaining jobs so they can live a crime-free life.

I commend DOC and parole supervision staff who work daily to protect public safety, and part of that work also includes providing reentry programs and services.

Kudos to all of you. Keep up the great work!

## **#LetsGo**

John Wetzel, Secretary of Corrections

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## **A Word From The Executive Deputy Secretary**

Reentry, in addition to all that we do inside our facilities, is so important. In this newsletter you'll read about "juvenile" lifer cases that our staff worked so hard to prepare for release due to a court ruling. You'll read about facility career/reentry fairs that are held inside our prisons to introduce inmates to potential employers. You'll read about the good things reentrants do, such as help with Habitat for Humanity or crochet items for a local non-profit organization. You'll read about former inmates returning to prison to speak to inmates to prepare them for the world beyond our fences and walls.

A successful reentry is a success for society. We need to continue to embrace work in this area and help society to understand the importance of these initiatives.

Congratulations to everyone who plays a role in reentry and who helps keep an individual from reoffending.

Shirley Moore Smeal  
Executive Deputy Secretary

## Former Reentrants Speak to “Juvenile” Lifer

On March 15, York Community Corrections Center (CCC) welcomed successful former reentrants Aaron Grice and Danny Cox to the center to speak to transitioning “juvenile” lifer Clarence Laudenberger. Laudenberger arrived at the center only two days earlier. Grice and Cox have been involved with Life’s Beacon, an ex-offender group, and have created their own mentoring program called Ladder to the Light. Grice transitioned through the York CCC in 2012 and used his experience as a wake-up call to change his lifestyle. Grice and Cox have met with the center’s other “juvenile” lifer, Hector Flores, and helped him to find employment during the first week he was at the center. They hope to help Laudenberger in the same way. They also provide transportation and support to center residents.

In addition to their work with “juvenile” lifers, Grice and Cox also visit the center’s weekly reentry groups on Monday evenings to speak to the entire house.

**Pictured from left: York CCC Counselor Nelson Polite, York CCC Intern Matt Brondi, Aaron Grice, Danny Cox and “juvenile” lifer Clarence Laudenberger.**



## Houtzdale Holds Career Fair



On August 14, SCI Houtzdale hosted a Career Fair/ Reentry Services Office (RSO) event in which 15 vendors/services provided information to approximately 100 inmates.

Representatives from the following agencies participated: Bureau of Community Corrections, Parole & Reentry, Pennsylvania Housing Finance Association and Mental Health Services.

The inmate population also was able to discuss possible job prospects with several vendors including American Building Contractors Association, Tradesman International and employment assistance representatives from the PA Office of Vocation Rehabilitation (OVR) and Express Employment Pros. Vendors provided literature and were available to answer questions and discuss possible opportunities and assistance to those in attendance.

Inmates with a minimum or maximum sentence expiration date occurring in the next 12 months, or inmates who had passed their minimum date, but were able to provide a positive parole action were invited to attend. In addition to the inmates who fit the admittance qualifications, 12 RSO inmates were in attendance with the goal to experience the Career Fair/ RSO event and be able to share their experience with future RSO participants through peer/mentor services within the RSO program.

Inmates who requested a mock interview following the event were provided one with Education and RSO staff. Pamphlets and literature obtained during the Career Fair/RSO event were made available to the entire SCI Houtzdale population through a binder located in the general population library for future assistance with reentry needs.

## “Juvenile” Lifers Share their Experiences

Recently, three released “juvenile” lifers visited the DOC’s central office, so they could participate in a video conference with all currently-serving juvenile lifers. During the video conference, which was coordinated by project manager Robert Hammond Jr., the men spoke of their experiences leading up to and after release from prison and hoped that their experiences would help those who are seeking release from prison.

Highlights discussed included the importance of communication, having good interviewing skills, having proper identification and the importance of getting a mentor. They also talked about how technology – and the fact that it changes so fast on the street -- was one of their biggest challenges. They also talked about how every juvenile lifer has the right to redemption, but that it’s also up to every juvenile lifer to achieve it.

In 2012, the United States Supreme Court held in *Miller v. Alabama* that it is unconstitutional to sentence a juvenile offender to *mandatory* life-without parole. The *Miller* Court did not determine if the decision should be applied retroactively, and left that question to the states. In 2013, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decided in *Commonwealth v. Cunningham* that *Miller* was not retroactive.

In January 2016, however, the United States Supreme Court disagreed. It held in *Montgomery v. Louisiana* that *Miller* should, in fact, be applied retroactively and thus apply to cases decided prior to the 2012 ruling. In practical terms, this means that those juvenile offenders previously sentenced to mandatory life-without-parole can seek resentencing by the trial court. There were 521 inmates initially identified as being juvenile lifers in the PA DOC; however, three died prior to their release from prison. As of January, 2019, 399 juvenile lifers have been resentenced, 163 have been released.



Pictured, from left to right, are: Henry Wim-bush (Mahanoy), Douglas Hollis (Mahanoy), Larry Washington (former inmate and mentor to juvenile lifers) and Juvenile Lifer Project Manager Robert Hammond Jr.

## Reentrants Crochet Animals for Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh

Reentrants at the Pittsburgh Community Corrections Center (CCC) have been working hard over the past few weeks to crochet animals and blankets to give to patients at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC for Easter. Pittsburgh CCC reentrants have found unique ways to use their skills to give back to the local Pittsburgh community. In-house crocheting at the center provides the reentrants with a relaxing alternative to some of the more fast-paced community service opportunities in the area. Crocheting has been found to reduce stress and improve fine motor skills. In addition to crocheting animals and blankets, Pittsburgh CCC reentrants have also collected crayons and coloring books to donate to the hospital.



Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, a hospital of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, is the only hospital in Southwestern Pennsylvania dedicated solely to the care of infants, children, and young adults. Located in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh, the hospital is just a short distance from Pittsburgh CCC.

## Career Pathways: Laying the Groundwork Meetings

In September 2015, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) was awarded a three-year, \$1 million *Improved Reentry Education* grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The goal is to build sustainable, industry-driven career pathways that prepare inmates with in-demand skills while incarcerated and connect those individuals to jobs, support services and ongoing education upon release.

Six state correctional institutions (SCIs) were involved in the development of the Career Pathways Framework to determine how we can help inmates become “job ready.” Officials thank SCIs Coal Township, Dallas, Fayette, Houtzdale, Mahanoy and Pine Grove for pioneering the original framework.

During Spring 2018, the remaining 19 SCIs were visited and introduced to the Career Pathways Framework. Almost 200 employees were provided the framework and instructions to think about how their SCI would implement the framework by fall 2018.

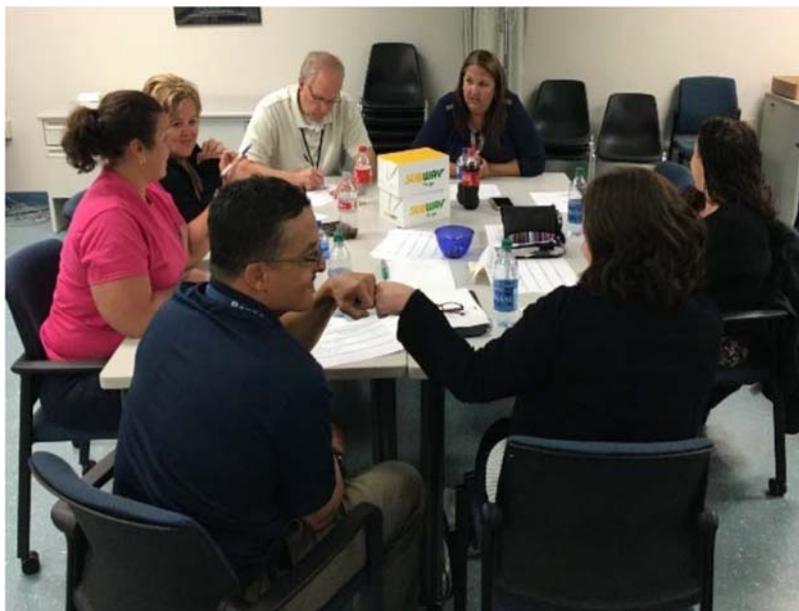
In July 2018, six off-site meetings were held throughout Pennsylvania for the 19 non-pilot SCIs to review the Career Pathways Framework.

At this meeting, each SCI discussed what they are already doing to prepare inmates to be job ready, how these current activities fit into the Framework, and what can be improved. Based on this information, each SCI created action plans for how to implement the framework in its entirety.



Officials want to thank those who attended the Laying the Groundwork meetings in July. As discussed at the meetings, this is the first step to implementation. Facility employee efforts to help inmates become “job ready” is an ongoing process.

Individuals seeking additional information on the Career Pathways grant, please contact Career Pathways Program Manager Dorenda Hamarlund at 717-728-3525 or [dhamarlund@pa.gov](mailto:dhamarlund@pa.gov).



## Reentrant Success Story!

On August 11, four employees of Berks Connections/Pretrial Services (BCPS) spent the morning volunteering with Habitat for Humanity Berks County (HFHBC) at their Tulpehocken Street property in Reading, Pa.

The BCPS crew was joined that morning by Roberto. Roberto was first referred to the BCPS Workforce Development Program while housed at the Wernersville Community Corrections Center in April 2017. He quickly completed his scheduled classes and was referred by the agency to an employer. Roberto began employment on May 15, 2017. He has retained his employment since that day. During that time, he has continued to work with our financial program coordinator to save a significant amount of money as well as begin to invest for his retirement.

BCPS has developed a collaborative partnership with Habitat for Humanity Berks County through the agency's U.S. Department of Labor Reentry Employment Opportunity Training Grant Award. Although Roberto did not take part in the training program, he was referred to their home ownership program based on his success throughout our Workforce Development Program. Roberto was accepted into their homeownership program and is well on his way to achieving home ownership through HFHBC! BCPS employees Nicolle Schnovel (Co- Executive Director), Christine Guistwite (Reentry Director), Kerry Kerschner (DOC Reentry Director) and Willie Colon (Reentry Mentoring Specialist) volunteered their time and donated their volunteer hours to Roberto towards his required total needed to complete the HFHBC ownership program. BCPS is proud of Roberto and his commitment to his reentry and changing his life! He is one of many successful reentrants who have been referred to BCPS through the Department of Corrections/Bureau of Community Corrections' Reentry Support Services Program.



## Update on a “Juvenile” Lifer

At the age of 15, Bobby Harris was sentenced to life in prison. As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in 2010 (Miller v. Alabama), which established that it is unconstitutional to sentence a juvenile offender to mandatory life-without-parole and the 2016 Montgomery V. Louisiana ruling, Harris' case was reviewed and, based upon his position adjustments in prison, the district attorney's office recommended a shorter sentence of immediate parole eligibility. Pennsylvania, among all other states, had the highest number of such “juvenile” lifers, with a total of 521. As of January 2019, 399 “juvenile” lifers have been resentenced, and 163 have been released from prison.

Harris spends his time working with at-risk juveniles to educate them about living a crime-free life to avoid spending 29 years in prison like he did.

“He works tirelessly to help and make a difference in not only the youths, but the adults as well. I've watched him take calls daily from his brothers that are currently incarcerated and who need his assistance and expertise in the specific areas of their need, or just to give a positive word,” said Harris' girlfriend, Lisa Muhammad.

Recently Harris attended a DePaul University Workshop for Community Leaders. Harris has been hired fulltime and will full benefits with Just Leadership USA as a community organizer.

“I am extremely proud and excited to see what the future holds for him,” Muhammad said. “In fact, the district attorney has accepted the scholarship that Bobby has put together in prison, as the face of the District Attorney Restorative Justice Department.”



## Reentrant Addresses Inmates

Henry Wimbush, a reentrant who was sentenced to 20 to 40 years for robbery and is presently on parole, recently spoke to inmates at SCI Camp Hill about his previous experiences.

His presentation focused on establishing a foundation for the future while incarcerated. Wimbush spoke about ways to maintain a positive outlook while living behind bars. His presentation was a collaborative effort with Becky MacDicken from the PA Department of Banking and Securities. During the presentation, he conveyed the necessity of investing in your emotional wellbeing as well as your financial future. Wimbush indicated both are necessary for a successful future.



The inmates in the prison's Transitional Housing Unit expressed their pleasant surprise after hearing from someone who could truly relate to their experiences. Several inmates reported they felt the sincerity of Wimbush's testimony and the sense of hope he had to offer. Prison officials hope he will be able to return to speak in the future, including to inmates in the prison's therapeutic communities.

## SCI Somerset Successful Reentrant Highlight

Two PA DOC numbers and three returns as a parole violator by the age of 34 doesn't sound like the record of a successful re-entrant. But when Shannon Myers returned on his third parole violation, something finally clicked and he decided to make some changes in his life. While housed at SCI Somerset from November 2011 to September 2013 he completed his recommended programming, acted as a peer facilitator on the therapeutic community and was very active in the Chaplaincy Department, even facilitating some bible study classes with his peers. It was obvious in how he carried himself and his behavior that he was making better decisions in his life.

The most impressive decision observed was him making was one that shocked many staff and even some of his family. Based on the Parole Board's Decision, he served his maximum sentence during his last period of incarceration. Prior to determining a date for the event, staff involved in planning the Day of Responsibility for 2013 had spoken to Mr. Myers about participating in that event as an inmate speaker because of the positive changes that he had been consistently displaying. He was very excited about this opportunity. So much so, that when a date was chosen to have the event and it coincided with Mr. Myers' max date, which happened to be September 17, 2013, he told staff that he wanted to stay at SCI Somerset to participate in the program prior to his release, rather than leaving first thing that morning. **This was an unheard of concept that took many people aback.** Based on his request, special arrangements were made for his family to come pick him up at 3:30 p.m. on his release date, rather than the customary 8:30 a.m. He not only stayed to fulfill his speaking engagement that day, but remained for the entire event, and gave a very moving talk on personal responsibility.

Since that date he has successfully become a productive member of society in the York, PA area. Mr. Myers holds a full-time job, has gotten married, and is active in his church and the recovery community. He has returned to SCI Somerset twice since that September 2013, once to take part in another Day of Responsibility Program, as a successful reentrant, and again to preach a sermon in the Chaplaincy Department. He has also made several trips to the local area to speak at local churches and travels throughout the state discussing his story, personal responsibility, and taking part in religious services. More than six years have passed since the day that Shannon Myers made the decision to make some changes in his life, and so far they have paid off greatly. We intend to continue to invite him back in the future as an excellent example to our current inmates of the positive changes that they can make if they just decide to.

Melanie Pyle  
Corrections Classification and Program Manager  
SCI Somerset

## Reality Beyond the Fence

Reality Beyond the Fence is a program at SCI Mercer featuring reentrants addressing the general population on how they were able to overcome the odds and negative stigma that come with having a felony conviction. Two men spoke of their trials, tribulations, struggles and fears they confronted once released and how they persevered and rose to the challenge of the adversity they faced.

The purpose of this program is to encourage, inspire and motivate the general population to start preparing for release the day they enter the prison system. Inmates were told that while reentry is not easy, becoming a positive role model and a productive member of society is achievable, if they put forth the effort.



The first speaker was Michael Hooks, who spoke in November. Hooks is a unique speaker as his delivery is very straight forward and to the point. He speaks at the audience's level and stresses adamantly that success starts before release.

The second speaker is in the process of being scheduled. He was in and out of jail several times before he was able to succeed in staying out. He will talk about the hard work, diligence, and positive attitude it takes to have a successful reentry. He will stress that if you get knocked down, you have to get back up and find a different way to make it on the outside without returning to negative behaviors.

Pictured above is Michael Hooks.

## Successful Partnership Involves Successful Reentrants

Earlier this year, Harrisburg City officials held a ribbon cutting for Harrisburg Uptown Building (HUB) and Veteran's Housing (HUB VH).

The HUB campus is the result of an innovative and much needed collaboration and partnership of people and organizations throughout the City of Harrisburg. The HUB, the building that formerly housed Hamilton Health Center, will be home to various for profit and nonprofit organizations that provide services to Harrisburg residents with a focus on community services. The HUB VH, which is new construction, is the result of an awarded tax credit awarded by Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and financed through a local bank, to build a 20 one-bedroom apartment facility for veterans.



With the partnership of his aunt, Juanita Edrington-Grant, and her non-profit, Christian Recovery Aftercare Ministry, Inc. (CRAM), Tarik Casteel, a local entrepreneur and reentrant, participated as a co-developer, project manager and general contractor, and was able to successfully bring to life their vision which is now known as The HUB Campus, primarily using local residents and contractors. Successful reentrants who previously had been supervised out of the Harrisburg District Office have given back to the community through their many skills and experiences.

Shown in the photo is: Parole Supervisor Ebony Anderson with builder Tarik Casteel (reentrant). Casteel and others, including additional reentrants, spent countless hours building programs designed to help other convicted felons to become productive members of society. Their programs offer housing for homeless veterans, computer literacy, GED classes, work-based training programs, mentoring, family reunification and the list goes on. It was 10 years ago that Mr. Casteel was incarcerated in a state prison. He wrote his business plan while incarcerated, and immediately upon his release from prison, he put together a team of individuals to help him move forward with his plans.

The HUB Veteran House was built in less a year after breaking ground August 2017.

## Attorney General Reentry Council Visits Pine Grove

Charla Plaines, the reentry coordinator for the PA Attorney General's Reentry Council, along with other Office of Attorney General staff visited SCI Pine Grove on July 23, to conduct a presentation about statewide community reentry services as well as addressing barriers, (i.e. housing and employment) faced by reentrants.

They were accompanied by Friends Rehabilitation Services based out of Philadelphia. Eighty inmates attended the program, which was spearheaded by Reentry Parole Agent Dana Brahim.



## Somerset Holds Reentry Fair

On August 8, SCI Somerset officials held a Reentry Fair in its gymnasium for more than 250 inmates. There were approximately 20 vendors represented, bringing an abundance of beneficial resources for those preparing to reenter the community within the next six months.

A sample of the agencies and programs represented include ASCRA, All State Career, PA Department of Banking and Security, Salvation Army, Peer Star LLC, Cambria/Somerset Victim Services, United Way, Pittsburgh CCC, DOC Veterans Services, Bureau of Education, Foundation of Hope Aftercare, PA Innocence Project, Institute for Community Justice FIGHT from Philadelphia, Goodwill and SCI Greene Employees.

## Inmate Thanks Staff for Job Fair

After attending a inmate Job Fair at SCI Waymart, an inmate sent the following note to the school principal:

"Thank you again for adding my name to the Job Fair list, it was extremely informative. I have been incarcerated since the age of 19. I am 51 years of age. My Minimum date is May 2019.

While attending the Job Fair, I had the opportunity to utilize "Virtual Reality" to visit area half-way houses. While the information was very helpful, I noticed that my anxiety decreased while using the virtual system. As you may understand, I have a great fear of social interactions up my release. Obviously, I'm used to a structured environment however, I'm very anxious about something as simple as walking down the street. I believe that using the virtual system could assist myself and other long term inmates in reintegration back into society. Even using the system to show us amid a crowd could be helpful. Maybe this is something that could be added to the Reentry Service Office classes."

The principal said she would share the information with virtual reality administrators and wished the inmate the best of luck upon his release from prison.

## Smithfield Holds Hope and Reentry Program

On August 7, SCI Smithfield hosted a "Hope and Reentry" program, which was attended by PA State Senator Camera Bartolotta, PA Representative Chris Rabb, staff from The Center for Returning Citizens and the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Also in attendance was a former SCI Smithfield juvenile lifer John Thompson, Jr., who is working for a reentry program in Philadelphia. The day's program provided information regarding reentry services and current legislative initiatives as it relates to juvenile lifers.



## A Tug at Your Heartstrings

By Rachel Mills, Corrections Counselor, SCI Smithfield

On October 22, Joseph Frisina walked out SCI Smithfield a free man, after serving 40 years as a "juvenile lifer." He didn't leave alone. Harper, a black Labrador retriever raised at Smithfield as part of the Canine Partners for Life Prison Pup service dog program, went with him.

Harper was released from the service dog program after being diagnosed with degenerative joint disease. The tough news came after Harper had been paired with a recipient and was living elsewhere. Knowing Joe was leaving prison soon after being re-sentenced, Kammy Laird, staff coordinator for the prison pup program asked if he would like to adopt Harper.

*(Continued on Page 11)*

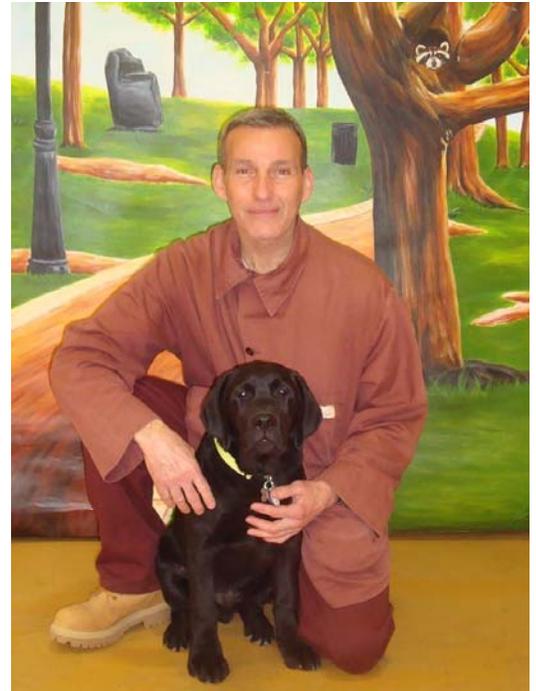
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Joe did not hesitate. After talking with his family in Erie with whom he would be living and also consulting with parole, an application was made for adoption. Canine Partners for Life was thrilled! They accepted his application and things started to move forward. The big question was

how to get Harper to Joe. That's when Laird came up with an idea. What if Harper could be brought back to Smithfield and leave with Joe? She got approval from the administrative staff for this to happen.

Joe was prepared to pay the \$300 adoption fee, but Canine Partners for Life told him they waive the fee for those who raise dogs who become eligible for adoption. Harper returned to Smithfield with the trainers from Canine Partners for Life and was reunited with Joe (see picture below) Harper was then approved to be released as part of Joe's "property." Everyone who knows Joe Frisina is very excited for him - the Smithfield staff and inmates. Joe gave his all to the Prison Pup Program for many years, long before he ever knew he might get to leave prison one day.

As sad as it is that Harper was unable to become a service dog, he will spend his life with the person that raised him to be one.



## Fayette Holds Inmate Job Fair

On July 18, SCI Fayette's Education Department held its annual job fair. The focus of the 2018 job fair was related to reentry services that deal with employment opportunities, education, financial aid, probation guidelines, housing and outside mental health resources, just to name a few.



Outside guests included the following organizations: Renewal, INC., A. Philip Randolph Institute, GEO Group, Dads Matter, Private Industry Council, CareerLink, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Department of Banking and Securities, Community College of Allegheny County, TTEC, Triangle Tech, Foundation of HOPE, and the Allstate Career School. Also attending the event were representatives from the Bureau of Community Corrections, a Parole ASCRA Agent and the DOC's statewide veterans' coordinator.

After the morning session, School Principal Edward Bohna led the outside guests on a tour of the facility. After the tour, the afternoon session was held. More than 200 inmates who were within 12 months of their minimum and/or maximum release dates attended the fair. Following the presentations, inmates had the opportunity to speak with vendors on a one-on-one basis. In addition to networking, the inmates left the job fair with a folder of informative handouts to aid them in their return home after incarceration.

# PBPP Reentry Roundup

*This regular feature of the Statewide Reentry newsletter provides updates on initiatives out of the PBPP's Bureau of Reentry Offender Coordination. The Bureau contains two divisions: Transition Services and Staff Liaison and Specialized Services and Community Outreach. Both divisions manage reentry-related projects and provide direct supervision to the PBPP's specialized field and institutional agents.*

## **Assessment, Sanctioning, and Community Resource Agents (ASCRA's)**

By Missy Repsher

In the previous column of Probation and Parole Reentry Roundup, staff were introduced to the Assessment Sanctioning and Community Resource Agents (ASCRA's) that support field supervision primarily by running cognitive-behavioral groups. There are many other projects in which ASCRA's have engaged/are currently engaging below are just a small sample of a few:

### **Eastern Region:**

**Project Safe Neighborhoods (Call-In Program)** – ASCRA's help to identify high-risk parolees in the 39th, 24th and 25th police districts and collaborate with federal and local authorities to enforce laws. ASCRA's also provide resources to those targeted for this program.

**CareerLink Reentry program** – ASCRA's collaborate with the surrounding CareerLinks and provide specific programming for reentrants. At the end of the training cycle, reentrants are then invited to a job fair and placed in meaningful employment.

**Resource meetings** – ASCRA's as a team invite community resource partners to make in house presentations at each of the PBPP offices in Philadelphia and Chester Districts.

**Juvenile Lifer support** -- ASCRA's are assisting the assigned Juvenile Lifer agents with supportive services and provide a monthly support group.

### **Central Region:**

**Reentry Coalitions** -- ASCRA's are very busy attending Reentry Coalitions/Community Meetings: Berks County, CRESC, Dauphin County, Franklin County, Lebanon County, Lehigh County, and Northampton County.

**Building Your Financial House** -- The Harrisburg ASCRA collaborated with the PA Housing Finance Authority to pilot and co-facilitate the Building Your Financial House for parolees in the district.

### **Western Region:**

**Reentrant Orientation** -- The ASCRA's in the Altoona District are piloting an orientation for all newly released reentrants being supervised in Blair County. Each Tuesday the ASCRA's run the orientation and develop supervision goals with the reentrants using the Carey Guide Self-Assessment identifying criminogenic needs as well as other immediate needs. ASCRA's also identify the reentrants who are eligible to attend the ASCRA Life Skills group and make referrals accordingly.

**Continuum of Care Board (COC)** — The Butler Sub-Office ASCRA represents the PBPP as a Board Member on the COC committee. The committee addresses homelessness issues in the Western Region of PA.

**Reentry Job Fairs** -- ASCRA's have assisted and attended many of the DOC Reentry Job Fairs. ASCRA's shared resources and community partners that they work closely with in the field.

*Missy Repsher is the director of the Probation and Parole's Bureau of Offender Reentry Coordination's Specialized Services and Community Outreach Division. She may be reached for correspondence regarding this article at [mrepsher@pa.gov](mailto:mrepsher@pa.gov).*

## Huntingdon Opens VSO

On August 1, SCI Huntingdon hosted an opening ceremony for the new Veterans Service Office. In attendance were representatives from the Altoona Veterans' Hospital, Veteran's Leadership Program, Tomorrow's Hope and the DOC's Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder.

There were 30 incarcerated veterans in attendance in addition to numerous staff members, including Superintendent Kevin Kauffman. The attendees were privileged to hear a moving dedication speech from Sgt. Matt Gibbons (retired), of the United States Army.

The SCI Huntingdon inmate color guard presented the Colors prior to the ceremony. Following the ceremony, the incarcerated veterans networked with the outside agencies and staff members.

The SCI Huntingdon's Veterans Service Office was formally dedicated to all veterans who are incarcerated or employed at SCI Huntingdon.



## Employees Present at APPA Conference

On July 31, a "Reentry: From The Inside Out" workshop was presented at the American Probation and Parole Association's 43rd Annual Training Institute Philadelphia, Pa. Presenting the workshop was SCI Laurel Highlands Unit Manager Rebecca Witt, SCI Laurel Highlands Reentry Parole Agent Tim Ross, Altoona Parole District Office ASCRA Michael Corson and former juvenile lifer and successful reentrant Joseph Romeri.

The presentation covered reentry programming in SCIs throughout Pennsylvania to an audience comprised mostly of individuals from other states. There also was a question-and-answer session with the highlight being Mr. Romeri, who shared his life experience of incarceration at a young age and his accomplishments throughout at 38-year sentence and how the reentry program at SCI Laurel Highlands (which he helped begin) ultimately assisted him in his successful reentry. He also shared with the crowd the process of being resentenced as a juvenile lifer, the parole process and his trials and tribulations of his release experience.



## ACKLEY PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE

Employees of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, SCI Pine Grove and Skills of Central PA presented at this year's State Community Transition Conference to an audience of 100 professionals.

The presentation, "PETS behind Prison Walls: A collaborative Approach in Serving SCI Pine Grove Youth" outlines a year-long effort to secure services typically offered by Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in mainstream schools to incarcerated youth by a subcontractor. The intent is not only to secure services but also to demonstrate the ability to think outside the box and work together as a network in new and creative ways to prepare future reentrants for community living. This project is just the beginning of the development of expanded services and new relationships for all three organizations.



# Peerstar LLC Visits SCI Houtzdale for VSU/RSO Workshop

August 7, 2018, marked the start of SCI Houtzdale's first citizenship group that is being facilitated by Peerstar, LLC. This workshop is made available through a Bureau of Community Corrections' service lot provider voucher.

Peerstar, LLC's Citizenship Program is an interactive and non-traditional mutual support group designed to be a beneficial resource for peers involved in the criminal justice system. Group sessions cover a wide range of topics such as healthy relationships, communication skills, negotiating the criminal justice system and strategies for successful community reintegration. The group is facilitated by a forensic certified peer specialist and is made up of five participants. Participants attend two groups per week for four weeks (eight groups total) and receive a certificate upon completion of the program.



The Citizenship Program uses the framework of Citizenship, an innovative model for community integration and social inclusion developed by PRCH. These nontraditional classes are geared toward the "5 R's" of community membership: *Rights, Responsibilities, Roles, Relationships and Resources*. Group skills building is combined with wraparound forensic peer support and role modeling within a social program with links to both treatment providers and the community at large. The program targets participants' isolation and lack of valued social roles and skills for successful community living.

## CDL Simulators Are Here!

The Bureau of Correction Education is excited to announce the addition of three commercial driver's license (CDL) simulators to its vocational training programs. As of January 2019, simulators are up and running at SCI Mahanoy and Forest. A third machine will be installed soon at SCI Smithfield to round out coverage in the three regions of the state.

The simulators are being used along with classroom instruction to prepare the student to take the CDL license exam once they are released on parole or residing in one of our centers. The simulators are designed to give the experience of sitting in and operating a full-sized truck. They are equipped with a digital steering system, three flat screen displays, fully adjustable side view mirrors, air ride seat, dispatch radio system, heavy duty manual transmission, 6-speed automatic transmission, as well as an instructor console with pre-recorded scenario descriptions and a full package of truck driving and CDL scenarios. These scenarios show several different environments covering urban, suburban, rural and highway training. Instructors are trained in the use of the system directly from the company and provide this training to our inmate students.

The Bureau's vision is that once a student completes this course, the information can be added to his reentry documents, and a soft hand-off to additional training and testing can be put into place prior to the inmate leaving the institution.

# SCI Greene's RSO Hosts Successful Reentrant

On December 10, Casey Mullen spoke to the SCI Greene Reentry Services Office inmates, those participating in alcohol and other drug programming and Career Pathways students. He overcame many obstacles to become a practicing attorney in Pittsburgh. He fought through both addiction and incarceration to become who he is today.

Called a failure, a junkie, an ex-con and a criminal...he worked tirelessly not to allow those labels to define him. Through hard work, rebuilding trust, and striving to reach his full potential he graduated from law school, passed the bar exam, and presently has his own law firm.



**Pictured, from left to right, are Social Worker Keli Reams Casey Mullen and Drug and Alcohol Treatment Specialist Sue Fazzini.**

## Laurel Highlands Holds Reentry, Career Fair

SCI Laurel Highlands held its annual Career and Reentry Fair on May 17, 2018. There were 22 vendors represented bringing an abundance of beneficial resources for those preparing to reenter the community within the next six months.

Agencies and programs represented included Community Action, Vivitrol Program, Career Link, LAU's Education Department - Flagging Course, Disability Options Network, Good Will Industries, Pittsburgh Community Services, Inc., Cambria County Day Reporting Center/ Geo, Inc., "Ask The Agent" with PBPP's ASCRAs, Greater Johnstown Career and Vocational Center, Transitional Housing Unit Program, Salvation Army, United Way, Berks County Pretrial Services, Department of Banking and Securities, Cambria and Somerset County Victim Services, Somerset Community Hospital – Smoking Cessation, Health Care Navigators, Bureau of Community Corrections, APRI–Pittsburgh-Apprenticeship/Reentry Housing, Recovery Unit Program, CenClear – Family and AOD/Health Services, Veterans' Services, and Transition and Reentry Advisory Committee/ Expungement Project.

