

REENTRY CAMPUS NEWS

ISSUE 4 | DECEMBER 2021

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WELCOME BACK TO THE REENTRY CAMPUS!

Welcome back! We are so pleased to have your attention again for another edition of the Reentry Campus Program's quarterly newsletter, the last one of 2021. Here in issue four, we have opportunities to share galore! So let's waste no time jumping into what's new and exciting in the reentry scene in Rhode Island. Thanks again for joining us, and enjoy!

HIGHLIGHTS

- On November 18th, at the Nonviolence Institute in collaboration with the Center for Health and Justice Transformation, we were successful in assisting Superior Court judges with eliminating over \$382,000 in court debt for 114 different Rhode Islanders. We are overjoyed with the results of this event, especially considering that it was the first of its kind. A very special thank you to the state Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts for making this happen!
- At last, the official Reentry Campus Program program guide is completed and ready for public distribution. This document describes our program design beginning to end, and outlines our strategies for measuring success in great detail. Our program guide goes on to list our collaborative partnerships, as well as detailing our recommendations for replicating our programming. You can find it on our website or in print in our office.
- We are so pleased to be able to announce that thanks to funding from the City of Providence, RCP is now hiring six Providence youths between the ages of 17 and 24 from January to June of 2022 to work with us on our new Community Outreach Initiative! Find more details about the program and the QR code to scan to apply on page 6. Deadline to apply is December 15th!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Our friends at The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice- a journal that "features art and writing from justice-involved persons and advocates through a combination of personal testimonies and research"- reached out to us in conjunction with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women and The Women's Project at the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) to extend the invitation to our community to submit pieces of art and writing for their upcoming winter and spring issues! Read the full submission guidelines on pages 11 - 13.
- Keep your eyes peeled for us on PBS sometime during January 2022! This past fall, some of our students and staff members were interviewed by a PBS film crew to be included in a piece in their series about the school to prison pipeline. They sat in on our first criminal justice class that took place here at our office, and shadowed some of our staff as they went to medium security to conduct monthly check-in's with students currently enrolled in the case management certificate. We are flattered and excited to be included in this series, so be sure to look out for us on PBS this winter!

MESSAGE TO THE READER

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On December 10th, 2009 I was released from prison in Baltimore, Maryland where I had spent most of a 10-year sentence. I had all the hope in the world that I could build a future brighter than the dark walls of the penitentiary that is stained in my memory, but I also had a sense of doubt caused by repeated failures and recidivism of my past. Just a few years earlier, after President Barack Obama won the presidency, I watched his speech from the rec room of my cell block. I stared at the TV in amazement and awe at the fact that we had just elected a black president. I felt for the first time in my life that I was an American in the full sense of the word. I felt pride and ownership. I made a vow to myself that upon release I would go back to school and, no matter what, would finish my education.

Working full-time during the day and part-time during the night to make ends meet, I took on a full course load. In one and a half years I was able to finish my BA degree in community development at Roger Williams University with honors and I have not had to look back since. Today, I have no worries about finding adequate paying employment. I feel fully capable of showing up as my best self, fully prepared to meet almost any job applicant requirements. And, I have a sense of what I like to call "True Freedom," the freedom of choices that having an education brings.

I was fortunate to have a friend and mentor that helped me to get back into school upon release. He stuck by my side and continued to push me. He served as a powerful example of what can happen to a person who was at one time caught up in the criminal justice system yet upon release prevailed. In gratitude, I asked him, "What do I owe you?" He responded, "Nothing; just make sure to pass that on to someone else." One year later, while presenting on stage at a Lumina conference, I was presented with that opportunity. I met a conscientious, influential, and professional woman, the Senior Vice-president of the Lumina Foundation, Danette Howard, who pushed me on that path to giving back. This effort landed us where we are now with the Reentry Campus Program (RCP), a nonprofit that helps guide and support incarcerated individuals toward their academic pursuits.

RCP's design and growth are developed through the lens of personal experience. We understand how important it is to make sure that those most impacted are not only "at the table," but also at the center of the decision-making around programmatic design and structure. This is why we made the decision to operate independently and in partnership with an academic institution.

MESSAGE TO THE READER



Many individuals end up in prison sometimes serving long sentences with nothing but time on their hands. Once incarcerated they are hustled into prison yards with the usual weight pits, handball and basketball courts. But for many, who are looking to better themselves and not only get out of prison but put themselves in a better position to be able stay out of prison, there is the education building and prison libraries which are not only filled with books but with learning communities of others who are trying to do the same. These are the individuals that spend countless hours in their cell blocks and housing units reading, studying and debating instead of playing cards or lifting weights. They spend hours, months, years studying caselaw and writing briefs to overturn their sentence or the prison sentences of others. They spend hours, weeks, years learning about their addictions and the underlying issues that brought them there, taking trauma informed classes, addiction studies, and reading psychology books comparing readings to their years of personal lived experience. Other inmates spend countless hours putting together business plans, researching best business practices along with marketing and distribution ideas.

This is my personal experience which informed the creation and direction of the Reentry Campus Program. I had spent years in prison studying developmental and abnormal psychology on my own, trying to understand the circumstances that kept me cycling in and out of prison. This self-study allowed me to take the CLEP test out of many courses needed for the psychology program that I applied to, greatly decreasing the time it took to achieve my associate degree. It became clear that more education equals more freedom, more freedom in the sense of freedom of choices. Once we as individuals find that sense of freedom, it's only right for us to want that for someone else.

It is one of the most rewarding experience to watch both those who are incarcerated at the RI Adult Correctional Institution (RI ACI) and those who are released from the ACI graduate with certificates, associate and bachelor's degrees and once released, obtain employment in careers that are directly related to the goals they set while in prison. These individuals go on to obtain rewarding careers that impact themselves and their families and communities. These successful individuals become advocates for those who are coming after them. It is my firmest belief that the greatest weapon against criminal addictive thinking is for those incarcerated to educate themselves so that when they have gotten out of prison, they make it in society legitimately in a way that removes and challenges any self-doubt. Once that self-doubt is removed all other barriers just become obstacles to be hurdled over and navigated through on the pathway to freedom. When we have found that freedom within ourselves it is only right that we would want that for someone else.

Sincerely,

James Monteiro, RCP Founder and Director



NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!

Reentry Campus Program is now hiring 6 Providence Youth ages 17-24 for our *RCP Community Outreach Initiative* funded by the City of Providence.

The program will run
January 10 - June 24
Monday- Friday 1-5pm
\$15/hr

Under the facilitation and guidance of the RCP Team, the youth will develop, implement and disseminate a comprehensive strategy to engage formerly incarcerated individuals in the educational services RCP offers while gaining career awareness and learning valuable 21st Century Skills.

APPLY TODAY

[Bit.ly/RCPOutreachApp](https://bit.ly/RCPOutreachApp)



APPLY BY DECEMBER 15TH

Questions? Contact:
ProgramManager.RCP@gmail.com



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WANTED: VOLUNTEER TUTORS



WEBSITE

www.ReentryCampusProgram.org

Volunteer intake questionnaire under "About Us" tab



CONTACT US

Comm.RCP@gmail.com

- Subjects that we are looking for tutors in include but are not limited to:
 - Criminal Justice, Substance Abuse, Math, & Business

VOLUNTEER TUTORS



- Tutoring can be done in person at our office on Broad Street in Providence or virtually- so you don't have to be local to Rhode Island!
- We require some basic level of education or professional experience in the field of study you'd like to tutor students in
- Experience tutoring (in any subject) is desirable, but not necessary
- Experience working with previously incarcerated population is desirable, but not necessary
- Study materials will be provided

Interested in helping out? Please get in touch!
Comm.RCP@gmail.com



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Your Next Best Hire Might Have a Criminal Record.

By Abigail Lucy Terry, Data & Communications Manager



Humor me for a moment, let's pretend we are hiring managers in HR, and we're looking at our final two applicants for a job opening. Candidate A seems to generally be what we are looking for, maybe they meet our qualifications and then some, but besides being qualified nothing else really stands out about this candidate. Candidate B has made it as far as they have in this hiring process because of their unique background and résumé. Candidate B has had a long and varied work history, but there are some year-long gaps between jobs. We find out in interviews that candidate B comes with priceless life experience that can't be measured on paper, however, their background check came back with some less-than-stellar information that explains the gaps in their résumé.

When questioned about this, candidate B is upfront and honest about all parts of their history, the good and the not-so-good. They seem to be confidently unashamed of their life's narrative, which initially comes off as a surprise to you, seeing as you assumed that a spotty criminal record is something that would elicit feelings of shame and embarrassment. The story they tell is

about the challenging position from which they began their life, and how over the years they defied the odds at every turn. Their harrowing tale reminds you that some people take their first breath on this planet with the cards already stacked against them, and what do they often receive from the world in response? Zero empathy. Candidate B concludes their turbulent narrative with what they have learned along the way about not only themselves, but the world at large and smarter strategies to navigate it. Their compelling authenticity is impossible to ignore and you're impressed by the way candidate B has taken advantage of every opportunity available to them to grow, learn, and develop new skills— it shows a clear commitment to the betterment of their future and demonstrates a particular, unique work ethic that candidate A (with no criminal record) does not seem to have.

So what do you do? Do you play it safe and hire candidate A who is "perfect" on paper but lacks the unique, character-building experiences of candidate B? Or do you hire candidate B with a criminal record and a non-traditional education journey, but enough perseverance, grit, charisma, and life experience to share with the whole organization? There is no single correct answer, but personally, I would hire candidate B. Seeing as one in three American adults

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have a criminal record **(1)**, I would wager there's incredible benefits to gain from building a staff that reflects the diversity of life experience that our customers or clients may very well have themselves. Never mind the benefits that the rest of my personnel and I stand to enjoy from being a part of a group containing such a multitude of perspectives, opinions, and backgrounds. Washington State University even asserts these benefits can include increased productivity, creativity, cultural awareness, and an improved reputation as an organization **(2)**.

In Rhode Island, the law mandates that all public and private employers with more than four employees must inform a job applicant that they are looking into their criminal history; and they may only do so during the applicant's first interview or later. Additionally, if an employer rejects an applicant based on this background check, they must provide the name and address of the company that provided the background check. Failure to abide by these regulations may result in punishment, including steep fines. These laws are in place to protect job seekers from companies that provide potential employers with incorrect criminal history information, as well as affording job seekers some level of protection from being rejected before given a fair chance **(3)**. However, ultimately, employers may still reject an applicant because of their criminal record. So it is the opinion of those who work closely with the previously incarcerated that these Rhode Island laws— while better than nothing— realistically don't do nearly enough to level the playing field for job seekers with a criminal record.

Perhaps with all those previously described laws and hiring procedures, you're still not convinced that hiring candidate B would be your best option in my proposed hypothetical situation. Fair enough. When it comes down to it, employers'

"bottom line" is often their primary concern. If that sounds like where you're coming from, then surely the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) will be of interest to you. The WOTC is a federal tax credit made available to employers who hire individuals that come from groups experiencing great barriers to gaining consistent employment. These eligible individuals include but are not limited to: veterans, SNAP (food stamp) recipients, and of course, the previously incarcerated (within one year of release). After a simple application process that requires very little paperwork, employers stand to reduce anywhere from \$1,200 to \$9,600 in federal income tax liability, per person hired. Employers are not only allowed to, but encouraged to multiply this benefit by hiring an unlimited number of eligible employees **(4)**. If additional security to insure this choice is important to you, then you will probably be pleased to hear that Rhode Island employers are able to access federal bonds to insure losses at zero cost, these federal bonds are purchased by the state and can go into effect on a new hire's first day **(5)**.

With these no-brainer benefits available to Rhode Island employers, advocates for the previously incarcerated are left pondering one important question: why don't more employers take advantage of this opportunity? The first potential

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answer is that they're simply unaware of its existence, an easily avoidable problem I hope to have begun to dismantle with this piece. The second potential answer is the more insidious and onerous of the two: some people are simply not ready to challenge their own prejudice. They discover anything other than a squeaky clean background check, and suddenly, whatever potential they saw that brought the applicant to this round of interviews is instantaneously dead on arrival. Ironically, this widespread fear and skepticism of the previously incarcerated as quality employees is a significant contributing factor to their inability to secure a legal way to support themselves and their families. These choices leave previously incarcerated job seekers exponentially more likely to make decisions that land them back in prison (6). In other words, closed-minded and resistant employers' prejudice creates the exact problem they think they're avoiding by not hiring someone with a criminal record.

So, now equipped with this knowledge, it is my hope that I leave you self-reflecting on the role you play. Ask yourself if you're going to be a part of the problem, or the solution. Ask yourself: would you hire candidate A, or candidate B?

SOURCES:

1. Friedman, Matthew. "Just Facts: As Many Americans Have Criminal Records as College Diplomas." Brennan Center for Justice, 17 Nov. 2015
2. Washington State University. "10 Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace." WSU Online MBA, 14 Jan. 2021
3. Matthew J. Rodgers "Rhode Island Background Check: A Complete Guide [2021]." Iprospectcheck, 14 Aug. 2021
4. U.S. Dept. of Labor and Training. "What Is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit?" Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, RI Gov, Feb. 2003
5. OpenDoors. "Strengthening Your Business." OpenDoors, OpenDoors
6. Rhode Island Family Life Center. "Employment & Prisoner Reentry in Rhode Island." Issue Brief on the Impact of Incarceration & Reentry, Rhode Island Family Life Center, May 2004

Are you interested in taking advantage of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)? Or have any other questions about the program?

Contact the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's Business Workforce Center at 1-888-616-JOBS (5627) or email esu@dlt.ri.gov

CALL FOR ART AND WRITING SUBMISSIONS:

Our friends at *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice*- a journal that "features art and writing from justice-involved persons and advocates through a combination of personal testimonies and research"- reached out to us in conjunction with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women and The Women's Project at the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) to extend the invitation to our community to submit pieces of art and writing!

The Journal is looking for art and writing from members of our community of *all genders* (both justice-involved and non-justice-involved) that highlights issues related to women and incarceration.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- The Winter 2021 edition of *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* will focus upon mass incarceration. What does it look like? How does it feel, both to justice-involved and to justice-impacted people? What are the causes and effects of mass incarceration, as demonstrated by research and lived experience? How can we end mass incarceration? These are all questions you might consider exploring in your work. Please take them as recommendations, not requirements.
- You may submit as many pieces as you would like. We ask that you title your submission(s).
- You may submit your entry using your name or anonymously. If you are willing and able, we ask that you include a brief biography and photo.

CALL FOR ART AND WRITING SUBMISSIONS:

GENERAL GUIDELINES CONTINUED:

- If you include a bio and are comfortable sharing, we ask that you specify where you are from. If you have been incarcerated and are comfortable sharing, we would also ask that you state where you were or are incarcerated.
- If you mention anyone specifically by name, please first ask their permission or, if that is not possible, use a pseudonym. Please change or limit details which might identify persons mentioned in your work.
- Interested persons should submit their work to *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* by **December 10, 2021** to be included in the winter issue.
- Please send your submission to women.reentry@gmail.com or, if email is not available to you, please mail your entry to:

New Jersey Reentry Corporation
ATTN: The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice
591 Summit Ave. STE 605B
Jersey City, NJ 07306

ART GUIDELINES:

- We accept art submissions in any medium (photography, drawing, printmaking, painting, etc.)
- Art submissions should be submitted in PDF, JPG, or PNG format. We ask that photo submissions be of high resolution (at least 800px)

CALL FOR ART AND WRITING SUBMISSIONS:

WRITING GUIDELINES:

- Written entries can be autobiographical or fictional narratives; research reports or analyses; op-eds; or poetry, short stories, and other creative works.
- There is not a minimum or maximum page length or word count requirement.
- Submissions may be typed or handwritten. If your writing is typed, we ask that you submit it in Times New Roman font, size 12, double spaced.
- If you refer to outside sources in your submission, please cite your sources using Chicago-Style footnotes and a works cited page.
- All writing will be edited for grammar and potentially for content.

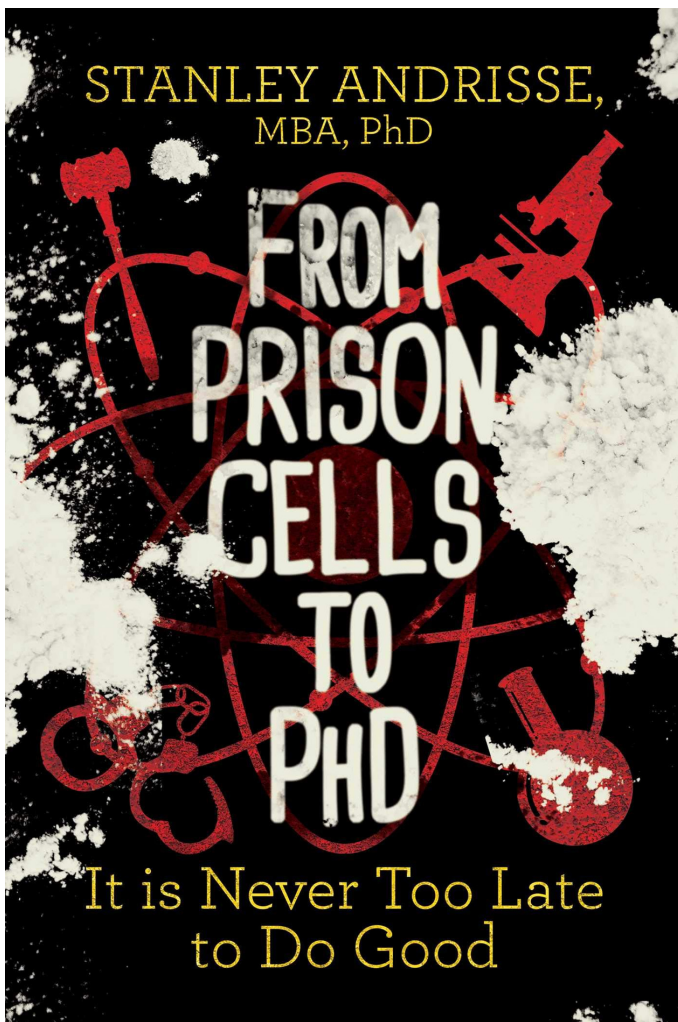


We are flattered by the extension of this exciting invitation from our pals in the reentry services field- *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* and the NJRC- a huge thank you to them for thinking of us and being interested in what our community has to say! We certainly plan to take advantage of this unique opportunity and encourage you to do so as well. Don't forget- interested persons need to submit their work to *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* by **December 10, 2021** to be included in the *winter* issue. Still submit your work even if it's past the December 10th deadline- your work will likely be included in a future issue!

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

READING RECCOMENDATION

'FROM PRISON CELLS TO PHD: IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO DO GOOD' By: Stanley Andrisse, MBA, PhD



➔ WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This book details Missouri-native Stanley Andrisse's incredible journey from getting arrested for selling dope at 14, to becoming a community leader and endocrinologist specializing in diabetes research at Johns Hopkins Medicine. You'll learn how he went from serving 10 years in maximum security, to earning his PhD and MBA simultaneously.

➔ WHY DO WE LOVE IT?

We love this read because Stanley's lifelong journey of learning and self-improvement greatly reflects those of our students and our staff. We love it because it further shows that our program's success isn't a fluke, but rather an effective strategy of addressing the well of untapped potential of previously incarcerated folks who want to grow.

➔ WHERE CAN YOU FIND IT?

'From Prison Cells to PhD: It is Never Too Late to Do Good' is available for online purchase in e-book or hardcover form from Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Target, and The Google Play Store.

REENTRY CAMPUS STUDENT HUB OFFICE HOURS

The entrance
across from
the UHaul on
Pine Street!



The front
desk you will
see when you
first walk in!



DATES:

Monday - Friday

TIMES:

9:00am - 5:00pm

LOCATION:

500 Broad St, Unit 1C,
Providence, RI, 02907

Study Center and PLA Testing office hours begin in May! Case managers will be standing by to assist with college prep, registration, applying for FAFSA, stabilization, and registration.

We are proud to offer students access to our new computer lab for individuals to drop in and get some work done. Student Support Specialists will be available there to assist with resumes, cover letters, and applications. Don't be a stranger- stop by to say hi!

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!



THE CLANEIL FOUNDATION

... AND READERS LIKE YOU!