



### Collaboration: Improving Outcomes in Prisoner Re-Entry

The State of New Jersey will have 70,000 offenders released into the community over the next five years, with more coming from county jails and juvenile facilities (New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, December 2003). This phenomenon of great numbers of prisoners re-entering the community is happening nationwide and the State of New Jersey is no different in having to make delicate choices regarding the commitment of financial resources to critical social issues such as the balance of public safety and offender rehabilitation. But what is the real issue? And then, how do we begin to address it?

Retribution? Rehabilitation? Public Safety? Why can't they be served concurrently? Nearly two-thirds of offenders being released from prison are rearrested within 3 years of their release. By contrast, inmates who enter halfway house programs have less than a 25% re-conviction rate in their first two years in the community. Investing in and equipping offenders with the skills necessary to live crime-free and productive lives is not only sound public policy but fiscally responsible. As the process of "re-entry" is examined, public and private agencies recognize that the provision of effective treatment services such as substance abuse treatment that meet the needs of returning ex-offenders is critical to their success and improves public safety.

Many people recognize that men and women who are incarcerated have incredible needs. Most of the people returning home are plagued with poor employment histories, have struggled with drugs and alcoholism, have been failed by traditional educational systems, have fractured families, and will face significant challenges when they return home. However, many people don't realize that 18% of adult inmates suffer from a chronic health condition, 10% were diagnosed with communicable diseases, and 16% were diagnosed with a mental illness (NJISJ, December 2003). These issues occur in greater number than compared to the general public. Compounding these needs of returning offenders is the lack of affordable housing the State of New Jersey. Collateral sanctions bar many offenders from accessing public housing and it is estimated that nearly 50% of the persons being served in homeless shelters have been released from the criminal justice system.

This year, the member agencies of the Coalition of Community Corrections Providers of New Jersey served 3,725 inmates leaving the New Jersey Department of Corrections and 7,445 parolees through the New Jersey State Parole Board. Two programs this year were

designed specifically for clients who are the hardest to serve; the homeless offender and those struggling with mental illness. The PATH Program (Parole Aftercare and Transitional Housing) in New Brunswick run by New Jersey Association on Correction reopened its doors to serve 20 men paroled who would have no other place to reside. Most of these men suffer from chronic health conditions and the staff work diligently with the NJ State Parole Board to manage their transition into appropriate services in the community. PROMISE (Program for Returning Offenders with Mental Illness Safely and Effectively) run by Volunteers of America Delaware Valley will serve up to 30 individuals this year who have been identified by Parole and the Department of Corrections as having a chronic mental illness that contributed to their criminality. PROMISE provides wrap-around services and links offenders with the psychiatric services they need and transitions them to supportive permanent housing in Camden County. PROMISE is a successful collaboration led by the NJ State Parole Board with NJ Department of Corrections, the Division of Mental Health Services, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

Providing community-based corrections services that have a meaningful impact on the lives of our clients and the communities in which we reside requires a commitment of all stakeholders. Through these types of collaboration, the chances for success and investment in individuals are possible.

*Pat McKernan, MSW, LSW*

*President*

*Coalition of the Community Corrections Providers of New Jersey*

*Chief Operating Officer for Corrections Services  
Volunteers of America Delaware Valley*

#### Rehabilitation at Work...

In Fiscal Year 2006 Halfway House participants contributed:

- nearly **\$550,000** in federal taxes,
- nearly **\$61,000** in State taxes,
- more than **\$161,000** in child support,
- more than **\$300,000** in fines and restitution, and contributed more than **\$931,000** toward their own stay offsetting the cost of providing halfway house services in New Jersey.

# Tasting Freedom's Simple Joys in the Barnes & Noble

By Samuel G. Freedman

Springfield, NJ -- Anthony Edwards patted the right pocket of his jeans, just to make sure his dictionary was there. He drew it out, thumbing the yellowing pages, pressing down the packing tape that held the cover. Then he walked through the front door and down the aisles of a shop along Route 22 here. He was 31 years old and going to a bookstore for the first time in his life, and he was determined to be able to understand every single word he encountered.

There was a lot to do in the next two hours. He needed to stop by the business section to look for a book that might help him with his plan to open a barbershop. He wanted to check out the music section, because his sister played the organ. In the children's section, he hoped to find something to interest his 13-year-old son, to get him off those video games.

Nearly a decade ago, hanging out in a bookstore would have seemed so corny. Back then, Mr. Edwards was a high school dropout, known as Kat on the streets of Paterson, and Top Cat on his arrest record, the one that described his itinerary for the evening of Nov. 12, 1997. With a friend, a stolen car and several weapons, he robbed nine people within an hour. He wound up with a few dollars, some jewelry and, ultimately, a prison sentence of 9 years, 10 months and 4 days.

All that time gave him a chance to reconsider the virtues of corniness. He had gotten his first dictionary in prison, from a friend serving 30 years for homicide. Mostly, Mr. Edwards took it to the law library, doing a felon's version of homework. Only later, after he was transferred to a halfway house in Newark, had someone suggested to him that reading had purposes beyond filing an appeal.

Her name was Alison Link, and she had the unlikely title of director of leisure education at Tully House, the facility in Newark that Mr. Edwards moved into last winter in preparation for his release in early 2007. Tully House, operated by the private company Community Education Centers under a contract with the State Corrections Department, contains 315 men, whose crimes range from drug possession to murder, and who have an average educational level of eighth grade. As they make the transition from inside, where every waking moment is regimented, to outside, where freedom is formless, Ms. Link has the job of introducing the inmates to recreational activities other than addiction and mayhem.

For all the bravado, the rap sheets and the tattoos, these men had lived what Darryl Hooper, the director of Tully House, called a "narrow existence." Most had never filed a tax return, managed a checking account, gone to a baseball game, worn a coat and tie, read aloud to their children. Ms. Link taught them how to throw a Frisbee and fly a kite, acts of almost surreal innocence.

The idea of going to a bookstore first came up nearly three years ago, during a discussion of leisure. A couple of the men then said they wanted to learn new things. Someone else said he wanted to do research. Ms. Link thought of the Barnes & Noble bookstore 15 minutes west of Tully House.

And so about a dozen residents, selected because they had no demerits for misbehavior, got to leave the halfway house for two hours, the first time many of them had been beyond its chain-link fence since arriving there.

Fearful of how a field trip for criminals might be

---

**“One of the things I noticed,” Mr. Edwards said, “is that freedom is a lot better than being locked up.”**

---

regarded, Ms. Link decided not to tell the bookstore. When several of the men headed for the CD section, the part of the store most favored by shoplifters, a floor manager called Debra Lampert-Rudman, the store's community relations coordinator, to ask, "Is this some kind of event you have?" Which led Ms. Lampert-Rudman to find Ms. Link, who seemed to be in charge, and ask, "Is this some kind of school?"

Ms. Link said something about a halfway house, something about leisure education, nothing explicitly about inmates, so Ms. Lampert-Rudman assumed the group was from a drug rehabilitation center. By the time she heard the full explanation, one or two visits later, she was eager to open the doors.

"My job is to care about our community, and these people are part of it," she said. "If they can find our store a place to go to avoid doing terrible things, how great is that? The worst that will happen to you here is someone will give you a bookmark or offer you a Frappuccino sample."

By this summer, Ms. Link had led 25 trips to the bookstore. On the most recent, Anthony Edwards found his way to the African-American section, where he began flipping through the book "Crowns," a collection of pho-

Continued on Page 4

# The Center for Urban Education Experience

By Fred Fogg

During my incarceration I had already begun to grow as a young man and no longer wanted to engage in criminal behavior. I began taking college courses and established a great relationship with the Director of Education, Mr. Lucas. Mr. Lucas helped me to apply to Rutgers University. My application was accepted, and it felt great. Although I had made significant changes in my behavior and attitude, I was very concerned about my ability to continue on this positive course once I was returned to the community. When it was time to apply for a halfway-house, Mr. Lucas suggested the Center for Urban Education (CUE). To this day I am extremely grateful for Mr. Lucas' help and suggestion to apply for CUE.

Once I was accepted to CUE, I awaited my release. I was excited to be given another opportunity to make a better life for myself, but anxious and uncertain about my future. I was somebody in the small world I lived/survived in prior to my incarceration. I had to humble myself to enter the real world and be successful. No matter how well I did in prison, there were no classes to prepare you for the transition. Prior to arriving at CUE, I perceived "halfway-houses" as community-based prisons, or community-based work release and nothing more. My perception changed upon arrival at the CUE House in Newark, NJ. We were a van load of prisoners, and I expected to be treated as such. I could have never been more wrong. I will never forget Ms. Latorre, who was the first person to greet us. She made us feel like we were family. As opposed to an immediate orientation



---

**“I was excited to be given another opportunity to make a better life for myself, but anxious and uncertain about my future.”**

---

about rules and regulations, she asked if we were hungry or tired, showed us around the house and told us to make ourselves at home.

I thought that this might be the calm before the storm, but soon learned that this warm and courteous

behavior was embedded in the culture of CUE.

Everyone we encountered that day, and throughout my time with CUE was genuinely concerned about the welfare and success of the residents. Everyone had a case manager who helped us to identify goals and objectives and to keep you on task. When I shared my plans with my case manager, Ms. Muhammad, she was as excited as I was. She immediately connected me with Ms. Diane Hill, Director of EOF for Rutgers University in Newark, and an employee of CUE. Ms. Hill helped me every step of the way. She gave me all of the information and support I needed to feel confident about attending Rutgers. She was always happy to help.

I immediately went to work and started my first bank account at City National, in Newark, NJ; these were requirements for CUE. You could not just exist; you had to be doing something positive, you were given positive feedback about your efforts and accomplishments, and you were confronted promptly regarding any shortcomings. There was really no excuse for not succeeding with such support. There were residents who were

returned to prison, because they were not ready to take advantage of opportunities afforded by CUE. I can say that I never saw a resident return to prison without the staff experiencing sadness and disappointment. It was always clear that no matter how much CUE cares, staff will not compromise the standards of the agency, nor jeopardize the safety of the community or the residents.

Another strong component of CUE was the House Meeting held one evening a week. These meetings were very inspirational. The facilitator encouraged the residents to be successful. He discussed relationships, our responsibility to family and the community, the importance of education, and many other topics. Many of us had never engaged in this type of positive dialogue. There is much that I have taken from these meetings but the most inspiring was a statement made by the facilitator at the first house meeting I attended, “I am not as interested in what got you here, as I am in what it’s going to take to keep you out”.

Many “Ex-offenders” are held back by how we

Continued on Page 4

# Urban Education

Continued from Page 3

believe we are perceived by the general public. If you judge me by my past, how am I to make a future for myself? How am I to believe that you can help change my life when you view me as a drug dealer? CUE wanted to know your strengths, the skills you had that would help you to succeed. CUE helped me to identify and to develop my skills, and fully explore my interests. For the first time in my life, I was doing everything that I had dreamed of all at once. I was working full time, going to school full time, and boxing.

My experience at CUE has helped me to realize that with a little hard work and support you can achieve anything. I am currently working as hard if not harder than I did when I was a resident at CUE. I am currently the Director of Operations in New Jersey, for a national agency; I am in my second year of graduate school at Lincoln University with a 3.9 GPA, married with two beautiful boys, I own my home and 2 cars. I guess for most this is the "American Dream"; had it not been for the "CUE Experience" it might have been nothing more than a fantasy. I am eternally grateful for the vision CUE House is. I hope that I am at least close to what Mr. John Pinkard envisioned as success and if not, let him know that I will be soon.

*"Your responsibility doesn't stop with providing quality services to your client, nor does it end when they walk out your door. It continues until we change the system, when we begin impacting how this society deals with offenders both in the community and in our prisons. We are unlikely to significantly decrease our dependence on a failed experiment. Prisons have never and will never prove to be effective agents of change. We know that-it's time everyone else did."*

Excerpted from New Jersey Association on Correction Executive Director Jim Hemm's acceptance speech of the International Community Corrections Association's 2006 Margaret Mead Award.

# Freedom's Simple Joys

Continued from Page 2

tos of black women in their church hats. The pictures had him thinking of his mother, the improbable faith she had held, even for him when he was high and running the streets.

Then he and Aleem Duggins, another resident, located the business books, in a corner near the front window. They had heard there was a sequel to one of their favorites, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People."

After that, Mr. Edwards doubled back to the children's section. He stared for a while at the Harry Potter display, paralyzed. "I don't even know what my son likes reading," he finally said. "I'm just starting to get to know him."

The others in the group had their own destinations. Hratch Zadoyan grabbed a sports almanac to settle an argument about who played quarterback for Dallas in Super Bowl V. Eric Duncan settled into a chair with an encyclopedia of hip-hop. Anthony Martinelli, who has spent 27 of his 46 years in prison, was mistaken for a salesman. And that bit of grace rattled the heck out of him.

"I'm used to people being scared of me," he said. "Coming from Newark, being wild. I've been told I look mean all the time. I was kind of lost today, so maybe I didn't look so mean. I never been in no bookstore before."

Before she drove the van back to Tully House, Ms. Link gathered the men for coffee, pastries and a debriefing. Did anybody get lost? Did anybody get bored? Was it stressful? Would anyone be interested in coming back for the chess club on a Sunday night?

"One of the things I noticed," Mr. Edwards said, "is that freedom is a lot better than being locked up."

*[Reprinted with permission from the New York Times, August 2, 2006]*

## CCCPNJ Partners

BI

CENTER FOR URBAN EDUCATION

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTERS

INTEGRITY HOUSE

THE KINTOCK GROUP

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION ON CORRECTIONS

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA DELAWARE VALLEY

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA GREATER NEW YORK

Please visit  
[www.cccpnj.org](http://www.cccpnj.org)  
for more information.

The Coalition of Community Corrections Providers of New Jersey is an association of 10 organizations that operate a variety of residential and day treatment services for adult and juvenile offenders. Through partnerships with the New Jersey Department of Corrections, the New Jersey State Parole Board, and the Juvenile Justice Commission re-entry services are provided to over 4,000 offenders on a daily basis.