



Strengthening Community Through Second Chances

Transformations

June 2013

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I wanted to cry when I got this email:

Gail, I'm afraid I e-mailed prematurely yesterday. The guest house owner called me today and regretfully withdrew his job offer. Apparently, one of his staff looked me up online yesterday, and saw my status on the sex offender registry.

I had told the owner that my offense occurred in 2002 and that I have successfully and continuously addressed my sex addiction issue in treatment, therapy, and recovery in the 11 years since then. Unfortunately, I wasn't prosecuted until 2008.

The owner was very sympathetic about my situation, but, after talking further with his staff, he called back to say that several of them were adamantly unwilling to work with a registered sex offender. So that's that.

This is, of course, immensely frustrating, painful and maddening to me. I wonder, if, in fact, regardless of everything I've done since 2002 to take responsibility for my mistakes and to rebuild my life, my status as a sex offender renders me so "radioactive," that I will never be able to get any kind of decent job. This is not, unfortunately, the first time that a viable job prospect has suddenly fallen through, for just that reason.

I also feel foolish and embarrassed about having e-mailed you my news yesterday, and then having to retract it so abruptly tonight.

Do you have any advice for this college-educated, highly-qualified individual?



The OAR Advocacy & Leadership Program learns about advocacy and grassroots

organization strategies at their Advocacy Workshop in May at St. George's Episcopal Church in Arlington.

ARLINGTON-FALLS CHURCH INTERFAITH REENTRY COLLABORATIVE

Organizational Meeting June 27th

Faith Communities in Arlington and Falls Church are coming together to focus on reentry issues!

"Faith communities have historically been agents of change," said Rev. Dr. Green, pastor of Wilson Boulevard Christian. "It is time for us to collectively and intentionally work together to take a revolutionary stance to help those returning to our community from incarceration, and, equally important, to support their families and loved ones through this ordeal."

An organizational meeting of the new Arlington-Falls Church Interfaith Reentry Collaborative (working title) will be held at the **Wilson Boulevard Christian Church at 7 p.m. on June 27th**. The church is located at 3850 Wilson Blvd in Arlington. All are invited—paid staff and laity.

Co-conveners of the meeting are Father Andrew Merrow of St. Mary's Episcopal Church and Rev. Dr. Kathy Dwyer of Rock Spring Congregational Church.

Go to oaronline.org/upcomingevents and fill in the form to register! We hope to see you there!

At the June 27th meeting, the group will discuss the possibility of the Collaborative holding Quarterly Forums for members of congregations to attend, focused on some aspect of the criminal justice system. Topics for these forums might include:

- The Role of the Church in Reentry
- Why Mass Incarceration in the US?
- Local Resources for Folks Coming Home
- Mental Health Issues for Returning Citizens
- What Returning Citizens Can Teach Us
- The Plight of Children and Families
- Planning "Reentry Sunday" once a year

Alexandria Reentry Interfaith Council Gets Organized

The Alexandria Reentry Interfaith Council will be expanding its membership. A meeting date and place is being set soon. If you or your faith community resides in Alexandria, please let us know of your interest in joining the Council. Email Gail Arnall at garnall@oaronline.org.

SECOND CHANCE FUNDRAISING BREAKFAST

About 300 community members and public officials gathered on April 4th for OAR's fifth-annual Second Chance Fundraising Breakfast to hear about the accomplishments and challenges of those returning from incarceration.

"Many communities would just as soon turn their backs on them," said US Rep. Jim Moran. "We don't. We embrace them."

Miller & Long Concrete Construction was specifically lauded for its hiring of returning citizens. Otto Girr, Vice President of the firm, said some 100 former offenders are among its 2,500 workforce. "People deserve a second chance. It's hard, it's challenging, but it's the right thing to do and they are good workers."

Barbara H., an OAR client, shared her story: "OAR saved my life," she said. She explained how she lost a successful professional life in real estate and her family through drug addiction and time in prison. She was unable to find a job. "I was frustrated and angry. I couldn't deal with myself." It was at that point Barbara turned to OAR. "They listened. They extended their arms."

With community support, OAR will have provided services to over 2,500 clients by June 30th.

OAR is especially grateful to the businesses and individuals who joined with the OAR Board of Directors to sponsor the Breakfast this year:



Sheraton
Pentagon City
HOTEL

Anonymous

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Board of Directors



Jane Pittman

The Honorable Frank Fannon



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CAN COMPANIES BE SUED FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FORMER OFFENDERS?



The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed lawsuits this month against discount retailer Dollar General Corp. and a BMW manufacturing plant in South Carolina over their use of criminal background checks to screen out job applicants or fire employees.

The two lawsuits are the first since the agency issued revised guidance last year to warn employers against using overly broad criminal checks in a way that could limit job opportunities for people with past convictions. The commission says it wants to reduce barriers to employment for those with past criminal records who "have been held accountable and paid their dues."

"I know that businesses must screen job applicants, and that some positions are simply not going to be open to

folks with certain criminal offenses," said Gail Arnall, OAR Executive Director. "We wish businesses would take off "the box" on their applications -- asking a candidate if they have ever been convicted of a crime. Just say in the position description if the job is limited to those without a criminal conviction for X, Y, or Z," she explained. "Then, interview any applicant that has the qualifications. It is absolutely legal to ask whether someone has a criminal record, and to ask for details about that record. So many of our clients never get to the interview stage, and we know they are highly qualified."

One estimate is that 64 million adults in the US have a felony record; that's 1 in 4 adults. An incredible number of potential employees are being overlooked..

Do you hire former offenders? Would you write and tell us why?

Did you know...

52% of state prisoners in the US are a parent to a child under age 18; only 42% of these parents have ever had a visit with their children since being admitted to prison.

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS PAY COLLEGE TUITION FOR INMATES?

Over 25 years ago, Congress answered this question by discontinuing Pell Grants for inmates.

In light of experiences and the data, the question is being revised. A five-year national demonstration effort will provide three states with at least \$1 million in incentive funding, along with technical assistance, to create an education and reentry continuum that begins in prison and continues after release until the student achieves a degree or professional certification.

The three states are: New Jersey: 11 prisons, 8 colleges and universities; North Carolina: 8 prisons, 6 community colleges; and Michigan: 2 prisons, 3 community colleges.

The rationale for providing tuition assistance includes:

- Formerly incarcerated people will be able to find employment and increase earnings, thereby changing the cycle of inter-generational poverty, leading to incarceration.

- The quality of life in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by crime and incarceration will be improved, reducing recidivism, and increasing economic stability.

This innovative program is being funded by five leading foundations – the Ford Foundation, the Sunshine Lady Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. No federal funds will be used.

The hypothesis is that the investment in tuition will generate a significant savings in the correctional budget, as well as an increase in tax revenue, that can be spent (or saved) to address crucial needs in our states.

Quote of the day...

“I’d rather be wanted for murder than never be wanted at all.” — an at-risk teenager

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Gwen, Adam, and Libby

This month, we are featuring two of our administrative volunteers, Libby Folsom and Gwen Grewe. Libby and Gwen work in the OAR office multiple days each week, primarily assisting Adam Hand, Volunteer and Special Projects Manager, with countless (and often mundane!) tasks.

“Without the hard work of these ladies, there is no way we would be able to get all of the ‘back-end’ work done,” said Adam. “They are always ready and willing to help in whatever capacity I need them. Scanning records, recording volunteer hours, stuffing envelopes, or updating database entries, the list goes on and on, and they always have smiles on their faces! Gwen and Libby, you’re my lifesavers!”

CLIENT CORNER

One of our Community Service clients’ education and experience seemed ideal for work in OAR’s Employment Program (PREP), so his Community Service Case Manager referred him to Katy Steinbruck, Director of Reentry Services, to see if he would be a good fit. He began volunteering at PREP on Tuesday evenings to complete his assigned hours.

“He has a patience I have rarely seen,” said Katy. “Just recently he spent well over an hour just calming down a re-entry client who was very visibly upset. I am thrilled to have him working with us, and the best part is that, even though he has completed his Community Service hours, he is continuing to come in and work with us at PREP,” Katy said.



Advocacy & Leadership Program members playing putt-putt



Strengthening Community Through Second Chances

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OAR's MISSION

OAR, a community-based restorative justice organization, blends compassion and accountability to assist offenders in leading productive and responsible lives, to the benefit of all.

GET INVOLVED!

Donate! Online at OARonline.org/donateonline or by Mail (make check payable to "OAR")

Host us for an event!

Organize a gift card drive for OAR. Call us for the list of most needed cards.

Volunteer your time and talents to OAR.

Bring friends to a one-hour tour of our office! Future dates are always at OARonline.org/tours. Here are the dates and times for July and August:

Tues, 7/11/13—Noon

Thurs, 8/8/13—8:00am

Thurs, 7/25/13—6:30pm

Tues, 8/13/13—Noon

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