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Helping Men and Women Leaving Prison Make a Positive and Permanent Return To Our Community

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You can now make online donations to Project RETURN. To make a donation, visit our website at www.projectreturnmilwaukee.org

Make Your End of the Year Gift Go Farther

For 39 years Project RETURN has been making an impact on the lives of thousands of men and women returning from incarceration and their families. This has been done through the vision of the Board of Directors, the hard work of the staff and the gracious donation of time and talent by volunteers. Through this all, Project RETURN has been able to maintain a clear mission: To help men and women who have experienced incarceration make a positive, permanent return to community, family and friends.

While all of this is true, the work and mission would not exist without the support of the community. For the past four decades the organization has witnessed the community provide the encouragement and resources to ensure that our program continues. This support has come in many different shapes and sizes. Some have donated their time and talents by volunteering within the organization. This year we have seen the expansion of our Circles of Support programming largely in part due to the interest in the community to become involved as volunteers. Others have contributed their expertise to help with workshops and other re-entry services. And many others have financially backed the organization through monetary donations to the organization. This year we are very excited to announce that as part of a grant that was received from the Siebert Lutheran Foundation, for every donation received from individuals or faith communities, the foundation will match it dollar-for-dollar. This is an opportunity for you to see your donation have an even greater impact on the community.

We at Project RETURN would like to thank the Siebert Lutheran Foundation for your past and continued support to the ministry of Project RETURN and to our clients. We would also like to express our deep appreciation to the community for your continued support of those returning from incarceration. We are witnesses to change every day and could not do it without you and your belief that we are all better than the worst thing we have ever done. God bless you throughout the rest of 2019 and beyond.



Marquette University hosted the 39th Annual Celebrate the Return on November 2nd. The evening was filled with powerful testimonies and performances. In every facet of the evening, attendees could see the positive impacts people returning from incarceration were making. From the cover of banquet booklet (pictured left) which was conceived and drawn by Andre Jones who is currently incarcerated at Waupun Correctional Institution to silent auction donations like a bird bath, chimnea or canvas paintings, to even the redesigned logo which was done at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons were integral to the success of the evening. I could give you a detailed account of the evening, but I thought it would be more interesting coming from someone who witnessed the event for the first time. Austin McKenna, an intern at Project RETURN from Marquette, attended the event and wrote this reaction.

I recently attended the 39th Celebrate the Return banquet and it was phenomenal. My expectations were exceeded despite not having any since I've never been to a similar event. James E Causey emceed the event efficiently and introduced the speakers. We heard a powerful testimonial from Eugene "Geno" Nelson who embodies what Project RETURN aims to do since after getting out of prison he was able to finish college and is now the FSET coordinator at Project RETURN, which is truly inspiring. The three awards were given to people who definitely deserved them. One was given to founding member Elijah O'Neal, who had unfortunately passed away earlier this year, for all the work he put into the organization. Another was given to Sylvester Jackson who works with EXPO and has done a lot of work with the Unlock the Vote campaign to allow the formerly incarcerated to vote once their prison stay is over. The last award was given to Conor Williams who has done a lot of work with a new project called Circles of Support as well as his work through Community Advocates, the Re-Entry Council and the Transitional Jobs Collaborative. They also recognized the members of Project RETURN including us interns which was pretty cool. The food was delicious especially the mashed potatoes and chicken. The auction items were quite interesting since most were created by inmates of various correctional institutions. There was also a beautiful performance of a song called "Break Every Chain" by Lilia Scroggins who has a beautiful voice which made the song all that more powerful. However, the highlight of the night for me was The NARRATOR, AKA Thomas Hines, who gave a powerful spoken word performance. He's a recognized artist and has performed at Summerfest. He was also an intern at Project RETURN at one point. When I heard about spoken word, I had no idea what it was and thought it would be another testimonial, but I was wrong. Never before have I been more affected by anything and that was one of the greatest moments of my life. People were yelling out things like "WOOO" and "PREACH" which was an appropriate reaction. I was even more impressed when I learned he did the entire thing from memory and had never written it down so it was straight from the heart.

—Austin McKenna

It is a wonderful experience to be able to speak with the interns after the Celebrate the Return, to see the event again for the first time. Despite this being an annual event, every year has its own theme and direction. This year's theme was the Journey Home. One new aspect for this year was a series of posters entitled "Walk the Journey of Re-entry". These posters were produced by Talbot de St. Aubin and Abby Slye. We invite you to take the "walk" over the next couple of pages.

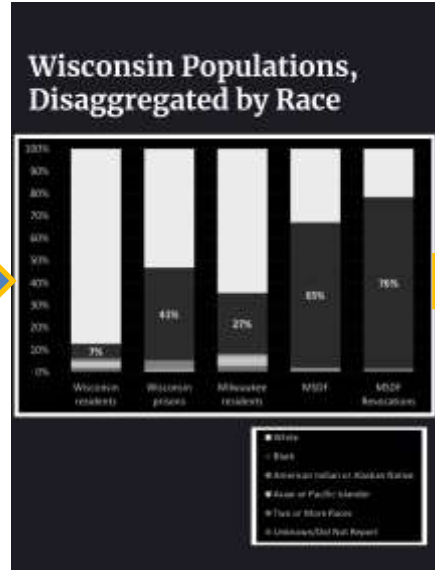
Walk the Journey of Reentry

America has 5% of the world's population, yet **25% of its prison population**

Wisconsin's prison population has more than tripled since 1990.

As a result, people incarcerated in Wisconsin serve time in prisons overcrowded to 129% of capacity.

Inmates who have mental health issues are often denied proper care or prescriptions.



There are **5,000** more people under community corrections supervision in Wisconsin than in Alaska, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming **combined**.

The Journey Home from prison has many obstacles:

Mark: "I was... **homeless** for about 6 weeks."

Laquisha: "I wasn't able to go back to my home... where my mother resides with all three of my kids"

Randy: "I was **absolutely convinced that I was a failure**. I was absolutely dependent and bound by drugs and my mental health issues, or so I thought at the time."

*All client names are pseudonyms

Project Return contributed to the "ban the box" movement, so that employers consider a job candidate's qualifications first—without the stigma of a conviction or arrest record.

Nationwide, 35 states and over 150 cities and counties have now adopted this policy.

Project Return...

- ➔ Secured Marty full-time employment, a job he still holds today.
- ➔ Assisted Aniqua with finding a place for her and her son that was within her budget.
- ➔ Successfully found Pedro a job through one of our temp service agencies
- ➔ Helped Derrick get involved in therapy and the Joseph's Project to help him work while he was incarcerated.

Project Return has been walking with formerly incarcerated individuals towards a successful journey home for the past 39 years.

In 2018 alone, with a small but dedicated staff, they worked directly with 1,126 people.

They have a vast array of services, including employment assistance, AODA counseling, housing, and Circles of Support.

Mission Statement: "Project RETURN (Returning Ex-incarcerated people To Urban Realities and Neighborhoods) exists to help men and women make a positive, permanent return to community, family and friends."

Imagine waking up on someone's couch with only one bus ticket to get you to your PO's office. There you're given an **extensive list of restrictions**, many of which you've unknowingly broken. Then they give you one more bus ticket and tell you to **get a job, go to AODA meetings, and see them again in two weeks**. So you apply to **as many places as possible**, and continually get rejected. **The one time you manage to get a job interview, your PO makes you meet with them at the same time** - so you're back to the couch. This cycle is repeated for months.

Andre & Brian
Project Return Case Workers



Brian: "Project return was the first organization that **opened up their doors to me**; that **didn't judge**. They didn't care about the background. They **seen who I was** and understood that what I did, it was a mistake."

Manny: "If it wasn't for Project Return, there's a good chance I would've given up."

Randy: "Those people, that staff, at Project Return put their arms around me and held me through my mess until I was able to hold myself."

"Unlock the Vote" bills are being proposed to allow inmates to vote once they are released.

Project Return's Advocacy Committee is working towards getting them passed.

"If I can leave anybody with anything, it would be to just **not judge people on the background**, you know, **give people a chance** to really show that they have been changed and rehabilitated and just **allow him another chance**."

- Brian

- You can help pave the journey home for these men and women by:
- ➔ Donating money to Project Return
 - ➔ Signing a petition to "ban the box"
 - ➔ Signing a petition to give ex-prisoners voting rights
 - ➔ Donating items to Project Return (clothes, work items, furniture, etc)
 - ➔ Volunteering
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