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Moving Forward

2016 has been a very productive year for Project RETURN. We have seen growth in our partnerships as well as the work we do on a daily basis. So far in 2016 we have assisted 106 clients in attaining 130 jobs, 121 people have been assisted in attaining stable housing through housing referrals, 120 clients with clothing needs, worked with 87 clients in our AODA program, and have provided other services as well. 2016 has also seen successes in legislature and awareness towards re-entry. We have come a long way, but we still have far to go. The biggest challenges facing a previously incarcerated person are housing and employment. Campaigns and legislation like Ban the Box and The Stronger Way Act have the potential to help a lot of people, so it is especially important to be aware of the problems surrounding this issue. We are updating our Facebook page about current events involving re-entry, and also recently have launched a Twitter account. Please follow our Facebook page, Project RETURN, and our Twitter, @ProjectRETURN1 to stay up to date on what we are working on and what work is being done in the community and surrounding areas. With your support, we hope to continue to work on the issues at hand and expand the work we do in the following months and years. Project RETURN is proud of the fact that we do not receive government funding, but instead are funded on private grants and donations. Your tax deductible gift to Project RETURN greatly helps us continue our mission, especially during the winter time when people are seeking housing and clothing to stay warm. If a monetary gift is not feasible, we also accept donations of gently used winter clothing and hygiene products. We thank you for your support in this year, and are excited to continue our mission and expand our partnerships in 2017 and beyond.



36th Annual Celebrate the Return

On October 15th, Project RETURN held our 36th Annual Celebrate the Return Banquet and Awards Celebration. This event was a huge success filled with inspiring testimonials and a very special keynote address by Reverend Richard Shaw from St. Matthew C.M.E. Church in Milwaukee. The event featured a silent auction with many donations from inmates currently incarcerated and the presentation of our annual Don Bein Volunteer Award and Elijah O'Neal Award of Excellence. Through this event Project RETURN was able to raise over \$23,000 for the re-entry work of Project RETURN.

Reverend Shaw shared his message of mercy with those in attendance. He noted the importance both of giving and receiving mercy, and how powerful it can be. This is especially important this year, as the pope has declared it the year of mercy. This means it is important to reflect on and forgive the past, and become more prepared for the future. Rev. Shaw also serves as the chair of the 53206 Initiative of MICAHA, which addresses the disparity and high rate of African Americans in incarceration. Both his message of mercy and living his message through MICAHA can have a powerful impact on our community.



The 36th Annual Celebrate the Return Banquet and Awards Celebration also featured entertainment though the talents of local artists. Artist Worldwide DG played his own acoustic songs written about life in inner city Milwaukee. The other vocal group of the evening, REVERB, is a part of the young adult ministry of CFFC. As a worship group, they gave a message of empowerment and spirituality, and it tied in well with the themes of the evening.

In addition to the vocal performances, we also were able to have a short skit performed by Voice of the Fatherless Child. In the skit, a young woman anxiously awaits her future child's father to return from incarceration, despite judgement from her family. Her mother wishes to welcome her boyfriend back, but the woman's father has reservations. However, with discussing how change has impacted his life, the father begins to believe that the young man could be different and learn from his past mistakes. This allowed the banquet attendees to see a more personal, family side to incarceration and continue to relate more to the message of mercy that was presented throughout the night.

The evening was a rousing success. But it could not have happened without the help of a lot of people. The event was hosted by Marquette University who, per usual, did an excellent job of making sure everything was perfect for the evening, from the room setup to the Meet & Greet to the food. Thank you especially goes out to Marquette's Provost Dr. Daniel J. Myers who not only underwrote the Meet & Greet but also attended and welcomed us to Marquette to open the program.

A very special thank you must go out to the David and Reva Logan Foundation who underwrote the entire event. Their support has been truly amazing and we are blessed to have it.

Partnership with St. Vincent de Paul Opens Opportunities in

Waukesha



Hephatha Lutheran Church Honored with The Don Bein Service Award

In 2005, Project RETURN set up an award to designate one volunteer who, through his or her outreach to us and our clients truly demonstrated that he or she is a champion of the mission of Project RETURN. This award was named after Don Bein, a man who fervently supported Project RETURN and our mission. He served for 22 years on the Board of Directors, serving in every capacity. During his time on the board, Don was extremely active in reaching out to people and uniting them for the cause of Project RETURN. He offered our clients excellent financial advice and showed them a path to stay out of prison. He did this through many volunteer outings such as to recreational events, jobs, church, or even the movies.



This year, Project RETURN, in commemoration of the hard work and commitment that Don Bein gave to us and our clientele, presented the Don Bein Service Award to Hephatha Lutheran Church.

Hephatha has been extremely active in the community, especially hailing from the most heavily incarcerated populations in the nation. In 2014 Project RETURN and Hephatha Lutheran Church were able to partner to address the extreme mass incarceration in the 53206 zip code. That year Hephatha opened their doors to welcome Project RETURN staff to work with the community near and around Hephatha on a weekly basis.

Since this humble beginning, Project RETURN has increased our presence to two days a week at Hephatha. Hephatha has remained a welcoming community not only to Project RETURN but to our clients and to those incarcerated. Hephatha is a shining example of a faith community that works to ensure that those returning from incarceration have a positive, supportive community to return to.

The Elijah O'Neal Award of Excellence

Elijah O'Neal is a founding member of Project RETURN thirty-six years ago. Before his involvement in Project RETURN, Elijah also gave back to the community through organizations like the Benedict Center and Self Help of Sheboygan. Elijah has tirelessly given of his time, talent and treasure to serving on the Board of Directors and mentoring clients one-on-one.

Throughout the thirty-six years, Elijah has brought the experiences and life lessons of a former offender to every endeavor he has taken part in. He has been a valued support to our clients, both for his firmness as well as his compassion.

The Elijah O'Neal Achievement Award is given annually to a client who has grown the most in a given year and shown other former offenders that change is possible.

This year's recipient is Oliver Johnson. Oliver has volunteered and partnered with Project RETURN for over a decade. Through this Oliver has become a trusted friend and advocate in the effort to effect real change in our community.

Oliver has been active with Project RETURN's Alumni Group and with the EXPO efforts to challenge the systems in place which are leading to mass incarceration in the state of Wisconsin and beyond. Oliver has helped to facilitate counseling sessions at Project RETURN and for Project RETURN at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections.

Oliver is continuing to be informed of what is happening both locally and nationally and brings this knowledge to everything he does. Oliver has sought after and attended training opportunities to expand his horizons. We are excited to continue to work with Oliver in the future.



On Thursdays the Project RETURN staff travels to Waukesha to extend services and work on advocacy outside of Milwaukee County. In Waukesha, we have partnered with St. Vincent De Paul's jail ministry group, St. Dismas. In this partnership we hope to continue to offer walk in services as well as direct case management to assist clients in obtaining jobs and housing. Though this has only been occurring for a few months, we have seen our clients in the area begin to spread the word about our services. This opportunity has provided us with the unique opportunity to service more clients, as well as to understand the differing needs of reentry in a suburban community.

Also in Waukesha, Executive Director Wendel Hruska has begun advocacy work to provide more opportunities to those returning from incarceration with their re-entry needs. He with members from St. Vincent de Paul and the Voice of the Poor have met with local legislators to implement new strategies to address the re-entry needs of those returning from incarceration. Within the next few weeks St. Vincent de Paul will create a new board which will be tasked with directing the actions of St. Vincent de Paul in relation to re-entry issues. This board will be made up of members from St. Vincent de Paul, St. Dismas Jail Ministry and Project RETURN. This board will have community members as well as those who have been formerly incarcerated. Beginning off we have identified two areas we are going to actively pursue in Waukesha, Ban the Box and Transitional Jobs.

Ban the Box

Ban the Box is a campaign that wishes to help previously incarcerated individuals by removing the criminal disclosure box on job applications. This does not bar an employer from conducting a background check before hiring, but it at least gives previously incarcerated applicants more of a chance to be looked at in the hiring process. It is very easy to filter out job applications with a box marked for criminal activities, and if found out later on instead it may give the applicant a chance to explain themselves or for the recruiter to understand who they are as a person before knowing their past. Where this has been implemented, the number of applicants with criminal records recommended for hire has nearly tripled, with the resulting number of hires increasing from 35 to 97. On average, 96.8 percent of those with records recommended for hire ultimately get the job. This campaign would greatly increase the ability for candidates to find suitable jobs.

Transitional Jobs

Transitional employment consists of placing long-term unemployed people in government sponsored subsidized employment with local employers and can be helpful in allowing people to gain job skills. Currently in Wisconsin these programs exist in Brown, Dane, Rock and Milwaukee counties. After participants finish their transitional employment, many are offered jobs with the company they were working with. This allows the company a chance to try out employees before hiring, helps grow and sustain their operations, and gives them assistance in recruiting qualified individuals. The Stronger Way Act is currently working on opening transitional jobs to more people with far fewer restrictions. Supporting this legislation could positively impact many lives, and hopefully create more employment throughout the country. Wisconsin's program has been in effect since 2010 and has helped over a thousand people secure a job for six months, with the majority going on to secure unsubsidized employment. With more support, this effect could be magnified and create better opportunities for many people.