

# NEWSLETTER

Winter, 2024



P R O J E C T  
**RETURN**

## 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebrate the Return

On October 26<sup>th</sup> Project RETURN hosted our 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebrate the Return at Alverno College in Milwaukee. Over 150 attendees were witness to powerful testimonials and performances as well as music selections from the Love, Peace and Soul Show Band.



This year's theme was Transforming Lives. Carl Fields, Director of Correcting the Narrative at the Community, emceed the evening. He brought his own powerful testimony of re-entry and his relationship with Project RETURN to the evening. Carl spoke about first learning about Project RETURN through a prison visit we did to Oakhill Correctional Institution where he heard from staff of Project RETURN how much he was needed back in our community. This led Carl to become an advocate for re-entry and set him on the career path he has been on for the past decade.

Two testimonials were presented. The first was by Chelsea Brehmer who was one of our first student interns through Marquette University. Chelsea spoke about her time at Project RETURN and how that shaped her worldview and eventual career direction as a researcher with the Innovative Partnership for the Advancement of Rehabilitation Research & Training (IPARRT) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



The second testimonial was made by David Murrell who is the Prison Outreach Director through WISDOM. David spoke about joining a gang at the age of 13 and eventually going to prison on a 75 year sentence. After serving 28 years David was released and made it a mission to work for change. David is currently a Circle Keeper at Project RETURN as well as an advocate for WISDOM.



Narrator closed out the evening with an original spoken word piece for the event. It was a powerful testament of re-entry work and the impact that is made through Project RETURN.

Project RETURN would like to thank everyone who made a donation to our silent auction. We had an eclectic mix of donated items from local businesses and individuals. We also received donations from several correctional institutions of items made by inmates.

Project RETURN is so thankful for all of the sponsors who made the night possible and a huge success. We would especially like to thank Hartmann Controls and von Briesen & Roper for kindly underwriting the evening. And finally, THANK YOU for your support for the past 44 years. Without you and your support we could not do what we do to transform lives!

## *The Elijah O'Neal Award of Excellence*

Elijah O'Neal was a founding member of Project RETURN. 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 tirelessly gave of his time, talent and treasure to serving on the Board of Directors and mentoring clients one-on-one until his death in 2018.



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 we are recognizing Andron Lane.

Andron Lane is the Milwaukee Turner Community Wellness Coordinator, bringing powerful, diverse energy and a unique skill set dedicated to healing Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities. With certifications as a Certified Peer Support Specialist (WRC), a Restorative Justice Circle Facilitator (Project RETURN), and Adult Mental Health First Aid, Andron is also pursuing a degree in Social Science with a minor in Cultural Diversity at Marquette University. Experienced in trauma reform settings, Andron excels in assisting system-impacted individuals navigate mental health conditions and physical trauma. His extensive work includes uplifting adults and youth through various programs and partnerships across the county. Beyond his professional achievements, Andron is a devoted father to his son. In 2020, he founded AQLS, LLC (Another Quality Life Style), a consultancy firm that advocates for advocating! Andron has been nominated for the Come Back Father of the Year Award (Fathers Making Progress) and has received the Community Engagement Award from North Avenue 3B. His ability to inspire and support people in reaching their personal goals is widely recognized and celebrated.

## *The Don Bein Service Award*

In 2005, Project RETURN created an award designated to 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 recreational events, jobs, church services, or even the movies.

This year's recipient is Laura Vuchetich. Laura has been a volunteer at Project RETURN since 2018. She started with the Circles of Support program, participating in a monthly Thursday night circle. In 2021, she joined the Housing Committee, getting nominated as its chair at the second meeting. When there was a lull in the housing work in late 2023, she reached out to Amanda Smit to ask if there were other ways she could lend a hand, specifically with activities that might allow her to work inside prisons. She believed that a fuller understanding of what people experience inside would make her better as a Circle of Support participant. She and Amanda have been leading Circles inside both the CRC and MWCC since the spring of this year. She's currently helping with the process of hiring a new Housing Director so that Project RETURN can be ready for the increased challenges of the next phase of the housing initiative.



As a fifth generation Milwaukee area resident, Laura is a believer in and champion of a healthy, thriving Milwaukee. She's also a mother of 3 grown boys and has been married to Scott for 30 years. She lives in Fox Point where she has converted most of her yard to native plantings, an orchard and a large vegetable garden. The other volunteer hats she wears are as a reading tutor for Forward Scholars and an active member of Impact 100. Otherwise, she takes care of her aging parents and plays a lot of tennis.

## *The Gwendolyn Moore Commitment to Restorative Justice Award*

At the 35th Anniversary Celebrate the Return in 2015, the Board of Directors of Project RETURN introduced an award honoring a lifetime of work dedicated to social justice. This award was named after Representative Gwendolyn Moore, the Congresswoman from the 4th Congressional District of Wisconsin. Rep. Moore serves on Project RETURN's Advisory Committee and has been a longtime advocate for the formerly incarcerated, dating back to her years in the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate.

Judge Mary Triggiano is this year's recipient of the Gwendolyn Moore award – an honor we have only bestowed on three others in the past. Judge Mary E. Triggiano is the Director of the Andrew Center for Restorative Justice and Clinical Professor of Law at Marquette University Law School. She teaches Restorative Justice and the Restorative Justice Clinical Program. She is the former Chief Judge for Milwaukee County Circuit Court.

Prior to joining the Law School, she was the Chief Judge for District 1 Circuit Court. Governor Doyle appointed her to the bench in 2004. She was assigned first to the Children's Division from August 2004 to August 2009. It was there that she became interested in restorative justice, participating in Justice Geske's restorative justice circles at Green Bay Correctional and helping to implement victim offender dialogues with youth charged with crimes in Milwaukee. She was next assigned to the Domestic Violence Court, later returning to Children's Court where she led the Family Drug Treatment Court and created the first of its kind in Wisconsin Healthy Infant Court. Her last assignment was the Civil Division.



As Chief Judge, she worked tirelessly with justice system partners to navigate and recover from the pandemic's tremendous impact and its aftermath, while keeping everyone safe. Prior to becoming a judge, she served as managing attorney for Legal Action of Wisconsin from 1994-2004. She also was an associate attorney in the litigation department at Reinhart, Boerner from 1988 to 1994.

During her tenure as a judge, she sat on a variety of committees and boards, including the National Governor's Association Conference on Child Well Being; Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board; Wisconsin Committee on Children, Families & Courts; and the Legislative Committee on Problem Solving Courts. She recently joined the board of the Neuroscience Research Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Community Service.

Judge Triggiano also collaborates with organizations to support community restorative justice programs. One key collaboration is with Project RETURN where law students participate in Project RETURN Circles of Support at the Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center and Community Reintegration Center.

Over the past 30 years, she has taught numerous topics to the judiciary, attorneys, medical professionals, academia, students and others. The topics included, but were not limited to: Restorative Justice, Trauma-Informed Care, Childhood Trauma, Child Welfare Law, Problem-Solving Courts, Evidence-Based Sentencing Practices, View from the Bench, and Domestic Violence.

Mary Triggiano has received numerous awards over the years including, among others: the **Association for Women Lawyers** Mentoring Award, Community Involvement Award, Pro Bono Award, and Founders Award; **St. Charles Exceeding Expectations Award**; **Milwaukee Young Lawyers Association/Legal Action Volunteer Lawyers Project** Exceptional Leadership Award; **Justinian Society of Lawyers** Jurist of the Year Award; **Milwaukee Bar Association** E. Michael McCann Distinguished Public Service Award; **Wisconsin Association for Treatment Court Professional's** Aulik Award; **MICAH** To Do What Is Just Award; **Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission** Certificate of Appreciation; and the **Charles L. Goldberg Distinguished Service Award**, presented annually to one lawyer in recognition of lifetime service in the public interest.



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## End of Year Thoughts from the Executive Director

A quarter of a century is a long time. That is how long I have been blessed to work at Project RETURN. We have seen a lot of change over that time. I remember my first couple of years working out of two offices at Project RETURN, working with around a hundred clients a year with a staff of two people. Today we have a staff of eight, with two more positions soon to expand our organization. It is exciting to witness the growth of Project RETURN, to see the positive change that is happening around re-entry in our community. I am proud of the work we do to help those returning from incarceration make a positive, permanent return to the community, family and friends.

This year has provided us with the opportunity to dream and grow, to put things in place to see program expansion and provide more resources for our community. Our Circles of Support program has helped over 450 people reconnect with stable, positive members in our community. Our outreach efforts have expanded to reach more communities and develop partnerships which have helped more people enroll in training opportunities and obtain employment. We are on the cusp of providing housing at Project RETURN which will include wraparound services to those just released from incarceration.

All this is only able to be done because of people like you. Without your support Project RETURN would never have been able to continue to provide resources and direction to the thousands of people we have worked with over the years. I am so thankful for your support. We will continue to expand and serve those returning to our community.