

VOICE

Issue 18 / 2023

REENTRY PROFILE



Bette, a participant in the California Reinvestment Grant through The Reentry Network, is 52: “I’ll be 53 this year. I’m a native San Franciscan. I was born and raised in San Francisco. Then I moved out [to Antioch]. I attended some college and participated in several specialist trainings, and things like that. I spoke out against police brutality on a case in San Francisco—one of the things I am actually really proud of. It’s something that I’m proud of, but it also came with heartache.

“I had an ex-boyfriend—who happened to be my abuser—who was shot by a San Francisco police officer. I would go to the police commission meetings. At that time, so many people I knew had been killed or beaten to death by the police in San Francisco. It had started to bother me. That was the reason why I wanted to go back to school: to get into the paralegal program, because I figured [it] would take too long to go to law school.

“[My ex-boyfriend] got shot. I would go to the police commission meetings and speak on his behalf. At the same time, his nephew-in-law was killed. He was shot over 70 times. My ex: he actually survived. I went to the Office of Citizen Complaints (now called the Department of Police Accountability, which investigates civilian complaints against San Francisco police officers) and filed a complaint, and it actually set a precedent because [the police officer who shot my ex] was the first San Francisco police officer who had actually gotten in trouble for shooting someone. It could have gone further, but being that [my ex] was the type of person that he was, I guess I cared more than he did. The officer did get in trouble, but we didn’t sue or anything. There was disciplinary action taken and also the Sunshine Ordinance (created to ensure the city’s decisions are available for residents to review) was amended.”

Bette said she’s determined, “because I’ve had to fight for everything. I am just happy to be here today. I have been through the highest highs and the lowest lows. I’m standing here, right now, and I’m looking out my patio. And my dog. She’s looking at me because she’s wondering, who am I speaking with? (Laughs.) I’m happy just to be here, in this space, at this time, and to be alive and have all of my senses. It’s a blessing. It’s an absolute blessing.

“I learned that I was stronger, and I am stronger, than I thought I was. I learned that there are people who do genuinely care. I learned not to be afraid, not to be afraid to ask for help, not to be embarrassed, and not to be ashamed. I know what my mother has instilled in me: What you put your mind to, you can do. She said that all of my life and I heard it, and I just—you know how you can hear something until you really are tested, and then...? Things like that have helped keep me going.”

What keeps Bette motivated is “knowing where I came from, and what I’ve accomplished, and what I don’t want to go back to doing. I wasn’t born into the things that I allowed myself to get involved in. So, therefore, I had to remember what the good times were like, and who I was, and what did I want, and what am I about, and what did I stand for, because I stood for something. I had to remember what it was, because I had forgotten. I was involved in a 25-year domestic relationship, and it was bad, and **CONTINUES ON PAGE 3**



DID YOU KNOW



COVID-19 Updates

In her reentry profile (in this issue), Bette said, “Things are a lot different” in the outside world. This is especially true with COVID-19. The latest update from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is that the most current booster—the bivalent booster—has been shown to prevent serious illness, especially among individuals with pre-existing health conditions. (The booster is called bivalent because it protects against the original strain of COVID-19 as well as more recent strains.) Even viruses change.

President Biden’s administration also issued a update. In a statement, the administration said that the federal public health emergencies will end on May 11. What that means is vaccines, which at the time of publication are free, will likely have a cost after May 11. So will booster shots and home testing kits. Congress has not approved additional funding to offset the costs of treatments, which were free. The costs for caregivers who do not have private health insurance are not yet available.

At the beginning of the pandemic, global health experts recom- **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**

EDITORS’ NOTES

Dear readers,
If there is one message that we noticed over and over in the stories in this issue, it’s this: *Change is possible*. There is no right time. There is no right age, even. Yet there is always the possibility to change, for better or for worse. The starting point sounds almost too easy, but it’s the moment when we acknowledge, deep down, that change can happen—it *needs* to happen. To us. Especially and even to us. That we can will it to happen.

Equally important, we’re not alone in this journey. Every one of us is on a journey. We are also in community—it will support us when we strive to be loving, kind, and generous to it. At first, everything will require effort. It might even feel like change is taking its damn time. But persevere. Do your best. Everything else will take care of itself.

Charmaine
Charmaine Hoggatt
The Reentry Network

Pat
Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

P.S. Not on our mailing list? Write and let us know where to send copies to you.

Mount Tamalpais College: Repairing Selves, Worlds

This is Part 1 of 2 in a series: Imagine a college close to the water’s edge, with stunning views of both a nearby mountain as well as a world-class city. Where students are taught to uphold its motto, *Discamus ut mundum reparemus* (Latin for “Let us repair the world”) and be among the best scholars in the world. Where teachers come from all walks of life and enjoy the act of teaching. Would you—could you—imagine that such a college campus exists inside a state prison?

Mount Tamalpais College was borne out of a disaster and a collective desire to transform that disaster into an opportunity. The disaster is called the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. It barred individuals who were locked up from receiving Pell Grants, a crucial government subsidy that helps students pay for college.

“Higher education in prison was commonplace in America until 1994,” said Lynn Novick, director of the 2019 documentary, “College Behind Bars.” The act, commonly referred to as the 1994 Crime Bill, or the Clinton Crime Bill, was responsible for shutting down over 300 prison higher education programs across the nation. (The law is still in effect at the time of publication.)

Out of this disaster, however, came the opportunity. Oakland’s Patten University and San Quentin State Prison formed an alliance and launched the College Program. In 1999, its first student was awarded an Associate of Arts degree. Over its 25 year history, the College Program was renamed twice: to Prison University Project in 2003 and to Mount Tamalpais College (MTC) in 2020. MTC President Jody Lewen has been with the college through much of its evolution.

“I’m older than the hills,” Lewen joked, then said she had learned about the program by coincidence: As a UC Berkeley undergraduate student taking a conference lunch break, she sat next to the woman who helped get the program

started. “I just thought, ‘Oh, my goodness, that sounds incredible.’ I co-taught a communications class that first spring of 1999, and then taught Literature and [Writing] Composition.” The rest is history.

Lewen went on to become the program coordinator in 2000 and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, led the program’s transition to becoming accredited, making MTC the first independent liberal arts institution specially dedicated to serving justice-impacted students in the nation.

The path to accreditation led MTC’s staff, faculty, and students to ask questions, many of them difficult. Lewen listed a couple: Could we become an independent school? What would that look like? What about stigma? Would people feel a degree from a college inside a prison is somehow stigmatized?

What Lewen later realized is that, with rapid changes in technology, hiding the fact that you’ve been incarcerated is more difficult than in the past.

“You can’t hide that anymore,” she said. “Those days are over. So, part of managing that stigma, our strategy had

to change. We can’t be hiding anymore. When I talked to a lot of alumni, one of the things they said was, ‘Do whatever you have to do to provide the best possible education to your students and everything else will take care of itself.’ In other words, if this will help you deliver a world-class education, then do it. I feel like our alumni are stigma-busters.”

Lewen added: “The cool thing about the accreditation process was that it really forced us to be intentional and specific, and to hold ourselves and to be held accountable. We had to have a plan, and we had to prioritize, and we had to think things through. We had to get help where we needed it.”

In Part 2 of this series (in the next issue), MTC alumnus Corey McNeil and fellow students not only came in to help, but also took leading roles in deciding the future of the college. We look forward to sharing his story and journey.

Mount Tamalpais College’s website states that all prospective students are accepted into the program

as long as they have a high school diploma or High School Equivalency Certificate (in California, the GED, HiSET, or TASC) and are eligible for transfer to San Quentin State Prison where on-site instruction is offered. Applications should be sent to “Admissions, Mount Tamalpais College, P.O. Box 492, San Quentin, CA 94964. Please include your full name and CDC number, confirmation that you have a GED or high school diploma, and your counselor’s name.

Higher education in prison was commonplace in America until 1994. The 1994 Crime Bill was responsible for shutting down over 300 prison education programs across the nation.

COVID-19, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
mended hand-washing with soap, trying to maintain a distance of 3 ft. to 6 ft. from anyone who is coughing or sneezing, and avoiding touching one’s eyes, nose, and mouth, whenever possible.

As the virus evolved and research generated more clues and greater understanding, experts added another recommendation: the use of masks—specifically N95 masks, if available—in large indoor gatherings, such as dining halls and mass transit, to prevent the spread of the virus. Mask use was and continues to be mixed.

At this latest stage of the pandemic, the Reentry Success Center and The Reentry Network continue to center around the needs of community members who have pre-existing health conditions, are over 65 years old, or are simply feeling safer wearing one. In practice, that translates to

team members who still wear N95 masks while indoors and especially in large gatherings. It also means visitors will continue to be asked a short list of questions before they are permitted inside. All of these measures are intended to keep everyone in our community safe and healthy not just today, but into the future.

The Reentry Success Center and The Reentry Network continue to be available to meet with justice-impacted individuals and their families to explore what supports are available. In-custody and reentry services also continue to be impacted by this outbreak.

Individuals awaiting release and in need of supportive services should send an in-mate request through the Adult School to Game Plan for Success. They will connect you to the Reentry Success Center or The Reentry Network.



Take Care of Yourself Fully During Difficult Times

There’s a story about two wolves. Some claim it’s Christian, while others say it is Cherokee in origin. Its origin is not important for the purpose of this retelling—it simply is a story passed down from generation to generation, because of its profound and timeless meaning. The story goes something like this:

One day, an elder sits down with a youth to teach the youth about life.

“A fight is going on inside me,” the elder says to the youth. “It’s a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil—full of rage, jealousy, arrogance, greed, regret, lies, laziness, and self-pity.”

The elder continues: “The other is good—filled with love, joy, peace, generosity, truth, empathy, courage, humility, and faith. This same fight is going on inside the hearts of everyone, young and old, including you.”

The youth pauses for a time to think. Then the youth asks the elder, “Which wolf wins?”

Appreciating the question, the elder looks at the youth, then replies, “The one you feed.”

While short, this story contains a wealth of wisdom. One is the awareness and acknowledgement that good and evil are in everyone, rich and poor, young and old. Another is that there is a path forward. That path also happens to support the winning of one of the wolves—the one that’s been fed. (The losing wolf is the one that gets weaker from not being fed.) And yet another—hidden in between words—is that it’s not important where the good wolf or the bad wolf is fed. That place could be inside or it could be outside.

Change doesn’t require a place, it requires a shift in mindset. Once the shift occurs, like ev-

everything, it requires energy—food—to continue moving in one direction.

“Liberation wants to be born,” said Gil Fronsdal, a teacher at Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City.

The question is, Do you want liberation? Can you imagine liberation happening for you?

Taking care of yourself fully, through self-care and resilience practices, requires an “Aha!” moment—an initial awareness—when a feeling

While the same fight is going on inside the hearts of everyone, young and old, each and every one of us also has different life experiences. Each of us requires differing doses.

comes up. “I’m so angry!” “I give up!” “If I can’t have it, then no one will!” But, instead of just reacting and letting such feelings fester, what follows afterwards is, Why? “Why am I so angry?” “Why am I giving up?” “Why am I so jealous?”

The story about two wolves only briefly mentions food. It doesn’t provide a list of what foods are needed in order to be a good or bad wolf. The fact that there is no set list is part of what makes the story timeless: It offers—or perhaps even challenges—listeners (and readers) the opportunity to learn, for themselves, what they

need in order to be good wolves. Curiosity and investigation are key to greater self-awareness. Because, while the same fight is going on inside the hearts of both young and old, each and every one of us has different life experiences. Because of that, each of us requires differing doses of the following self-care and resilience practices:

Self-care is any activity that promotes relaxation, stress reduction, and overall well-being. What makes you feel relaxed and at peace? Examples include practicing meditation or reading a book. Self-care is essential for reducing stress levels and improving mood. Consider prioritizing self-care during difficult times to help manage your emotions and improve your mental health.

Stay connected with others, particularly during difficult times. It’s essential to maintain connections with trusted family and friends, through whatever means possible. Talking to someone who understands and supports you can be a great source of comfort.

Manage stress by identifying the sources of stress in your life and trying to eliminate or reduce them. If that’s not possible, try to develop healthy coping strategies, such as deep breathing, exercise, or journaling. It can also be helpful to set realistic goals and prioritize your tasks to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Practice self-compassion, which can be very difficult, and yet it’s another important strategy for staying mentally healthy. Self-compassion involves treating yourself with kindness and understanding, especially in difficult times. Rather than beat yourself up for mistakes or failures, practice self-compassion. Acknowledge your emotions and treat yourself with empathy and care.

What’s working (or not working) for you? Write to us and let us know.

BETTE, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

I totally lost myself. It seems like I jumped off a cliff. It’s been five years [since the end of that relationship]. The last time I saw him, he fractured my face. That’s why, today, it’s just so awesome to be able to walk around in [my house] and not have to worry about anything. Nothing. Not one thing.”

Was there a point when everything just clicked and Bette realized, enough is enough? “Yes, yes, yes,” she said. “It happened several times. But the final time—I was not going to be a 50-year-old woman getting the shit beat out of me anymore. I refused to allow someone to take me away from my son. And my son just had a son. I have a grandson who turned two [years old] in February. But I would never have met him.

“I try not to think about it because it still stings, but I know it’s going to come to a time—I know that I have to forgive, because that’s a burden off of me. It’s getting easier and a little bit better, because before I couldn’t even think of [my ex]. My whole body—everything—would start to shake, and I could feel this negative energy just coming on. It’s just nasty.

“I know I don’t want to see him. I don’t want to be around him. I have to get rid of the rest of the hate that I do have, because it is hate. I know it is—it’s hate. So, I’m working on getting that out. That’s where I’m practicing focus—focusing on my humility—because I can’t just forgive him in the way [I did before]. Because I had forgiven him before, but then he got angry again. It’s a process. I’m nowhere where I was before, because

I couldn’t even think about him. It’s coming along better.”

Bette’s advice for justice-impacted members who are about to reenter society: “Don’t pay attention to everything that you see that’s going on, because things are a lot different. You can’t pay attention to all of these things that are in your face, that are just being shown to you. You have to be humble and grounded in something, or else you’ll fall for anything out here. Everything has just gotten so out of hand—you know what

Be honest with yourself. I cannot lie to myself. I reached out for help, and that is the moment when my life turned around and I got on the path that I am on today.

I mean? You have to know who you are in order to be able to walk down a certain path, so you won’t just fall victim to anything. You have to be grounded. If I did not do some of the things that I do—meditating, and reflection, and just working on my whole self, spiritually, mentally,

and emotionally—I probably wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t be alive.

“One other thing is be honest with yourself. I cannot lie to myself. I reached out for help, and that is the moment when my life turned around and I got on the path that I am on today. I was in a methadone clinic because I was using with my ex, and I had gotten involved in heroin—something that I did not know anything about. I got into the methadone program so I could put myself back together. I met Consuelo. She was my counselor. She asked me what did I want to do with myself. She was the first counselor who actually spoke to me about my future and what did I want to do.

“It sparked the neurons going back in my brain again. When she left the methadone clinic and went to HealthRIGHT 360, she came back and gave me her card, I just—my whole family can see the difference from five years ago to today. I wasn’t really speaking to anyone [in my family]. Now, I’m the reliable one. I’m the one who everyone calls. I’m the oldest, and it’s awesome. It’s like I have my life back. I feel blessed. You don’t really get too much of a second chance, and I feel that I have that, and I’m going to take advantage of it.”

Finally, Bette offered, “We have to love each other and respect one another, and put ourselves in the other person’s shoes. Be patient with one another, because you never know what somebody else may be going through. They might be going through the same thing, but just on a different spectrum. Slow down. Show some compassion.”

EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Women’s Group

5:30-7:30pm, safe space open to women for engaging conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center, in-person and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

TUESDAYS (ONGOING)

California Reinvestment Grant Groups

10:30-11:45am, substance use disorder relapse prevention, motivational interviewing, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)

WEDNESDAYS (ONGOING)

Restorative Practices: Arts Class

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center, in-person and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

Mental Health Group

10:30-11:45am, part of the county’s Integrated Cognitive Behavior Change Program, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)

Restorative Circles

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center in-person and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

FRIDAYS (ONGOING)

Forward Thinking Men’s Group

5:30-7:30pm, open to men for decompression and sharing of challenges, barriers, achievements, and everyday events, Reentry Success Center, in-person and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

OTHER

Mobile Resource App

Housing assistance, employment, education, vocational training, legal services, recovery support, and family support services made accessible directly on a smartphone, through the following QR Code:



EXPLORATIONS

We want to promote your artwork, photography, and poetry. Please write us at one of the mailing addresses below. Be sure to include “Reentry Newsletter Explorations” in the subject line.

POETRY

“Invitation to Brave Space,” by Micky ScottBey Jones, activist, healer, and organizer

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space”
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.

We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be our brave space together,
and
We will work on it side by side

GAMES

Fill in the blank squares, so each row, each column, and each block contain all digits 1 thru 9. Answers will be in the next issue.

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ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

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Contra Costa Reentry VOICE is published quarterly by the following organizations:



Reentry Success Center
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Richmond, CA 94801
reentrysuccess.org



Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360
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The following icons are included in the sections and next to specific events as a visual aid, for readers who prefer to scan our content. We hope you find them useful.



Housing



Education



Benefits



Family



Health



Legal



Financial



Employment