CICE

Issue 19 / 2023

REENTRY Q&A

Bobby, the oldest of seven children, turns 70 this year. One of his siblings, Mona, passed away a few weeks before this interview was completed:

"I'm a decent human being. I love people. I love life. I believe in fairness. I believe in people being treated equally—equally as possible—and especially in this society that we are living in today. I believe in respect. I believe in the old cliche: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.' You give respect, you get respect. Some people, they don't give it, but just because they don't give it doesn't mean that you don't have to. If someone disrespects me verbally, then I'll be, like, 'You have a good day, sir.' I'll say something positive to that person, and that might help him, and then just keep on going. I usually do stuff like that.

"I believe family is important. Family unity: I believe in that. I believe that's a big thing, if you can get it. A lot of families don't have that now. My family has unity, but we don't come together [as often]. There's no bickering or animosity toward each other. It's just that we have a difficult time coming together as a unit. I have another side of the family: they do all kinds of stuff together. Sometimes, I wish my family was like that. But, in my immediate family, everyone's doing their own thing. I respect that.

"I used to be a selfish individual. I always just thought about me, me, me. At this late stage in my life, I try to give back as best as I can—don't be as selfish about life. I'm not selfish. Well, I still am selfish, but I'm not selfish about a lot of things and just try to do the best that I can, and give when I can. That gives me satisfaction—selfsatisfaction. Other than that, I try to be fair to other people. I have no hang-ups with nobody."

Were you simply selfish and then woke up one day wanting to stop being that, or was that change gradual?

"It was gradual. For the first 10 years, I was a total a--hole. I wasn't trying to comply with no rules, no nothing. I was breaking laws left and right, just the way I was when I left the street. So, the last 12 years—because I did 23 years—the law changed and there was an opportunity for me to get out. In order for me to reach that goal, I had to participate in a lot of self-help groups.

"Self-help groups are what made me realize what selfishness really meant. I didn't know—I didn't have a clue what it meant. I thought I did, but it didn't. A lot of guys that go through the system don't really know a whole lot. They don't really know a lot of things—the way they lived in their mindset and everything. They don't have a clue. So I was out here living life, thinking that I was living life, when it was all selfishness, greed, and thinking just of self. It was all about me, me, me. Even to my own family. I was selfish toward my own family.

"Self-help groups are mostly targeted at lifers, even though they want everyone to participate. Guys that have a date, and they know they're going home, they're, like, 'Man, I don't need that stuff.' So-they'll be back. Just give 'em a little time. They will, because they're not working on change. You got to want to change. You got to work on change. And that's what those self-help groups are all about. CONTINUES ON PAGE 2



HOW TO



Remember Loved Ones

Everyone grieved the passing of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. To commemorate them, we will list their names, and any related art or photos you share, in our future issue (Issue 21). Submit names by inmate request through the Adult School Game Plan for Success. Or write us at one of the addresses on the back of this issue.

DID YOU KNOW



COVID-19 Update

The Federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration has ended. 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 possible. Individuals awaiting release and in need of supportive services should send an in-mate request through the Adult School to Game Plan for Success.

EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers,

There's a saying that time heals all wounds. While that might sound true, it often isn't. When has time, just by itself, healed anything?

While the last thing we want is to discredit that saying altogether, we invite you to examine and investigate further—be inquisitive, as Mount Tamalpais College alumnus Corey McNeil would say. We would all do well to be more inquisitive.

Time can only really heal wounds if we also make the positive choices that lead to being healed. In other words, there has to be a set of actions that will lead out us of the funk, the depression, and the addiction. Time won't do it all by itself, at least not in our experience.

We also know from experience that healing doesn't need to be done alone. We heal in community, as the stories in this issue show.

Charmaine Hoggatt The Reentry Network



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: Creating Opportunities

This is Part 2 of 2 in a series: Corey McNeil was in Soledad State Prison in Monterey County when he ran across some newsletters. Each issue had an address along with the name of a person to contact, and so one day he wrote that person and included in the letter what he wanted to do: go to college. At the time, McNeil knew he was up for classification, what he described as something like a quarterly evaluation. The letter McNeil wrote and the reply he received from the person he contacted were added to his record. A month later, McNeil transferred out of Soledad to San Quentin, which, as McNeil put it, "opened so many doors for me, it changed my life."

Mount Tamalpais College (MTC), where McNeil landed, is not a remote learning opportunity; all accepted students are transferred to San Quentin. It's also an accredited college with set curricula and structures.

"At other institutions, I call it do-it-yourself education," McNeil said. "You have to take the initiative to find the material or find the college that does correspondence. That's hard because you're trying to learn something that you don't know. A lot of guys have problems with that. I know I was one of those individuals, because I dropped out of school in the sixth or seventh grade. Learning in-person was instrumental for me."

The curriculum at MTC is rigorous, and nested in each lesson is a simple but powerful message: The opportunities are endless. In a documentary entitled "The Other Side of the Wall," McNeil's and another former inmate's journey are spotlighted. The film underscores how learning opportunities should be made available to everyone who seeks them, both inside and outside the prison system.

"What education does for me and what I believe it does for others is that it helps you see that it's more than about yourself, it's other people that you're connected to," McNeil said during a postfilm-screening discussion at the San Francisco Main Library.

Once MTC students receive their Associate of Arts degree, they can transfer, upon release, to

any other accredited college or university. MTC alumni have since gone on to pursue bachelor's degrees at places like UC Berkeley. Others have set their eyes on advanced degrees, such as a doctorate (PhD.) or law degree (J.D.). The opportunities are truly endless.

McNeil decided to continue his studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU) after his release. (SFSU is also home to Project Rebound, which offers support to justice-impacted students so they can integrate successfully in a college setting. Project Rebound is spotlighted in a past issue.) For his part, McNeil is working towards a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. He also serves as MTC's associate of alumni affairs.

The connection between MTC alumni and the

This is our college. We go through the work just like students at UC Berkeley or other institutions.

college is undeniable, largely because of how the college is run: Everything from the college's name to its logo and motto have had the students' imprint. MTC students are encouraged to lead and they step up to the challenge.

"It makes us feel like we've arrived," McNeil said, "and that this is our college. We go through the work just like students at UC Berkeley or at other institutions that don't have incarcerated students."

He added: "My future plans are definitely centered around education. My plan is to help students think in greater detail what [their future] would look like for them and how to go about accessing that. And my job is an extension of creating access to other students who are about to parole."

MTC lists on its website some key achieve-

ments, including a 60 percent budget increase, a \$2 million endowment to ensure its future, and a separate \$2 million to support alumni to continue their education post-release. The college also has a roadmap for how it will continue to meet current and future challenges and achieve its goals, which include strengthening academic excellence, expanding access for students, improving program quality, and promoting the empowerment of justice-impacted people.

"I want us to create the systems and gather the resources to really support people," MTC President Jody Lewen said. "Not only while they're inside thriving in school, but when they come home. Making sure they're connected not only to the basic kinds of resources and support they need, but that they're supported throughout their educational journey and developing the kind of career paths that they want."

Governor Gavin Newsom recently announced that San Quentin State Prison will be transformed from a maximum security prison into a rehabilitation and education center—the first of its kind in the nation.

In a statement, Newsom wrote, "California is transforming San Quentin, the state's most notorious prison with a dark past, into the nation's most innovative rehabilitation facility focused on building a brighter and safer future. Today, we take the step in our pursuit of true rehabilitation, justice, and safer communities through this evidence-backed investment, creating a new model for safety and justice—the California Model—that will lead the nation."

MTC's Lewen is on the Governor's advisory council helping to lead the change.

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 our 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.

BOBBY, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

"I was one of those in doubt about [the self-help groups], but they work. They work because they explore your childhood, and that's where everything—that's where the trauma—whatever your trauma was: dad hitting mom, or dad leaving mom, or dad treating mom, like, whatever. All those childhood traumas. Once you recognize and identify where those traumas came from, that's where you went wrong. That's where it all started—right there.

"Children don't come out being bad kids—period. There has to be reasons why these things happen. For me, it was a lot of trauma. My dad fought my mom, and everything, and stuff like that. He left us when I was still in grade school. I'm the oldest, so all my brothers and them are up under me. He left us when I was in the sixth grade, so I guess I was around 12 years old. He left us all, and he took off be with his other family that he preferred more.

"I understand him a little bit, because he was an ex-military man, had his hand blew off by a grenade. That was traumatizing in itself. I'm not making any excuses for him, because there was no excuse for him to inflict the abandonment that he created on his own children because of his own personal thing. He was supposed to work on that. So that shows where he didn't work on that himself. So, [the traumas] continued on. After he did the abandonment and all that, that opened the door for me, being I was the oldest, to do the things that I wanted to do. That's where it all started for me."

If you could describe yourself in one word, what would that word be, and why?

"I would say, misunderstood. The reason I say that is, because, when I was coming up, everybody thought I was no-good—a thief—because of the things that I did. I got into stealing and taking stuff. I didn't want to stop. That's an addictive behavior. I just didn't want to stop. I had plenty of chances, plenty of people behind me that wanted to help me stop all that, but I didn't want to. So I kept going.

"I've learned—I was in my sixties when I realized it—that I was a better person than what I exhibited all through my life. I was better than that. It took me that long to see that. This is why I do the things that I do now to give back. This is not about

me no more. I tried it my way, and it didn't work. The dream of a big car, big house, all this illegal money—it comes and goes, and doesn't last. I mean, you can have it today, in some kind of way, but you're going to suffer behind what you did.

"What was the most hurting thing for me—my mother passed away and God bless her—my mother knew I was doing that stuff, but you know what she said? 'My boy didn't do nothin'. He didn't do that. Y'all just blaming him.' But she knew it. She knew it. But that just shows you how a mother is going take care of her children. She would always stick up for me."

What have you learned about getting back on your feet? What's been most helpful to you?

"What's mostly been helpful for me—like I said, I did 23 years straight. It's not unusual to talk to guys that's done 40-something years, especially when you're in that environment and you talk to these guys. We say it like it's nothin', but to people out here, 23 years to them is like the end of the world. But, what I learned in that time and what kept me solid was my children—I got two daughters and twin boys—and my brothers and sisters. Family unity is **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**





BOBBY, CONTINUED FROM OPPOSITE PAGE what kept me together.

"Once I had the opportunity to make the change and get out, I decided to change. I decided to change because I was tired of hurting people. I was tired of doing wrong to other people. I didn't look at the victims that I was hurting and the effect [my actions] had on them."

What motivates you to stay on the right track?

"A lot of my grandkids, they were children [when I last saw them]. Now, they're grown with children. They always accept me back, and they always call me Bobby Grandpa. I'm highly motivated and dedicated to them because I feel that I threw my life away. No, not threw away. I lived it the way I wanted to live it—and it didn't work. So, I realized that. It took me 60 years to realize that. Now I see what's good. Now I realize that there's more to life than just myself. They keep me grounded. They give me the energy and the motivation to want to do what's right. And they don't want to see me back in, even when I watched them grow up in pictures.

"I have photographs that my daughter sent of them every year. And I watched them grow up in photographs. I have about 10 hours of photos of all of them growing up. Birthdays. Christmas holidays. Stuff like that. I have twin sons: they're 32 years old. I hadn't seen them in 23 years. Last time I was with them, they were eight or nine.

"It hurt [not to be with them]. It weighed on me because I was the parent, and I'm the adult, and because I knew it wasn't all right. They were hurt, too, but they just went on and lived their lives. They don't really want to talk about it."

"But healing is admitting. You have to admit it. I see a lot of people don't want to admit to the things that they do. We do the crime because we choose to do it. And there's reasons and circumstances why we choose that. Greed and selfishness are right there on the top of the list."

I appreciate your self-awareness.

"I learned it in prison." (Laughs)

Do you have advice for those who are about to re-enter society?

"Whatever change you made is just like new year resolutions. If you say that you're going to do something good, follow the path of that change. Stay on that path, because that's the winning path. There's going to be a lot of pressures out here. It's a lot of things. You'll see a lot of material things—you'll see a lot of everything. Go get your job, man. I got a job, rode a bicycle for eight months, and still got the bicycle that I rode back and forth. [Recently,] I was able to buy a car.

"There's a lot of programs out here. They help. They're helping now more than they ever. They're providing places to live. They got resources of people that's willing to give us jobs, and they know we're ex-felons. There's people out here willing to help and give us the chance to prove ourselves to ourselves, not to them. They're just going to help us do the right thing. Do the right thing. They will help you. You can make it. You can survive out here."

Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

"Do what's right when you come out. Love your family. They loved you, man. They loved you all the time. They waited for this moment for you to come out. If they waited for you to come home, now that you're home, don't disappoint them again. Live the rest of your life. That's what I'm gonna do. I'm not gonna hurt my children or my grandkids. They're so happy I'm home."

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, inperson and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

THURSDAYS (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)

https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us (Call 800-816-

Restorative Circles 🕒 🗐 🤀 🥪 🔇

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center in-person and on the Zoom videoconferencing app,

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)

<u>OTHER</u>

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

"Knowledge Unchained" (Author Unknown)

I am the bearer of a restless mind, A seeker of truth long confined. Through corridors of stone and steel, I hunger for knowledge that time conceals.

Born on the edge of a world unknown, My spirit ignited, a fire grown. In the shadows of forgotten lore, I yearn to unlock wisdom's door.

But chains of history bind my feet, Restricting the path I long to meet. Inequality's grip tightens its hold, Leaving my dreams untold, untold.

With each step forward, I am reminded, That access to education is still divided. From the halls of privilege, I am barred, While others freely journey far.

Yet within me, a flame burns bright, A determination to claim my right. To break the chains, shatter the mold, And seize the power education holds.

I'll rise above the walls that stand, Unleash my mind, reclaim my land. For education knows no color or creed, It is the bridge to the change we need.

So let me learn, let me grow, Release the shackles, let them go. For when knowledge flows unchained, A brighter future will be attained.

In the struggle for access, I'll persist, Resilience my weapon, my clenched fist. With courage, I'll conquer this divide, And education's power, I will ride.

Through the darkness, a beacon I'll be, Guiding others towards their destiny. For education is the key that will unlock, The doors of liberation, piece by piece, block by block.

Knowledge unchained, a revolution's birth, A world where education's for all on Earth. Let this dream be heard, let it be known, Access to education, we must own.

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 County 30 Muir Road Martinez, CA 94553 co.contra-costa.ca.us 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



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Education



Legal

Health



Employment

