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Kings County Re-Entry Task Force

Bi-Monthly Meeting of February 7, 2018 – Minutes

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| Meeting Date: | Wednesday, February 7, 2018 | |
| Meeting Time: | 12:30 pm – 2:56 pm | |
| Meeting Location: | Office of the Kings County District Attorney 350 Jay Street, 19th Floor – Bob Kaye Room, Brooklyn, NY 11201 | |
| Attendees: (From Attendance Sheet signatures) | <p>100 SUITS FOR 100 MEN: K. Livingston ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH: G. Ellis APEX TECHNICAL SCHOOL: Z. Cuesta</p> <p>BRIDGING ACCESS TO CARE: D. Osman BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES: S. Hamilton, J. Royall BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY: W. Cortes BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY: S. Sutton (Red Hook) BROOKLYN WOODS: S. Peltzer BROWNSVILLE MULTI SERVICE FAMILY HEALTH CENTER: A. Jones, E. Rodriguez BROWNSVILLE THINK TANK MATTERS: R. Robertson THE BURNING HOUSE PROJECT, INC.: M. Blackman</p> <p>CENTER FOR APPELLATE LITIGATION: S. Karlin CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP SDA CHURCH: Dr. A. Martin CHURCH OF GETHSEMANE / PROJECT CONNECT (SEE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH) CONGREGATION BETH ELOHIM: E. Sachs CORNELL UNIVERSITY ILR: R. Colman CORNELL UNIVERSITY ILR – CORNELL PROJECT FOR RECORDS ASSISTANCE: R., Joseph COURTNEY DREAMS: C. Parker</p> <p>THE DOE FUND / READY, WILLING & ABLE: A. Isaacs</p> <p>FAMILIES, FATHERS AND CHILDREN: B. Biegen, J. Palmaro FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CROWN HEIGHTS: Rev. D. Bloodsaw, R. Hurley, C. Smith FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (BROOKLYN HEIGHTS): J. Ehlke FRIENDS OF ISLAND ACADEMY: K. Mill FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH: Min. C. Royall</p> <p>HEALTHCARE CHOICES: P. Ammendola HIS MAJESTY INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP / PASTOR'S NETWORK OF AMERICA: Bishop A. Belgrove, Pastor D. Parks (Trinidad), Bishop W. Samuel HOPE CHILDREN: K. Jaime THE HOPE PROGRAM / SUSTAINABLE SOUTH BRONX: A. Douet</p> <p>KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE (CUNY): Dr. V. Seward</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">KINGS COUNTY RE-ENTRY TASK FORCE</p> <p>KINGS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE Renee V. Gregory, 1st Assistant District Attorney Christopher Owens, Co-Chair Designate Director, The Re-Entry Bureau Norma Fernandes, Case Manager Andrea Johnson, Case Manager Constance Johnson, Case Manager</p> <p>NYS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPERVISION (DOCCS) Kevin Uzzell, Co-Chair Designate, Bureau Chief Audrey Thompson, Re-entry Manager, Brooklyn Region Michelle Hall, Assistant Re-entry Manager, Brooklyn Region</p> <p>NYS DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES Margaret Chretien</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KINGS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY</p> <p>ComALERT Maria Abadia, Program Administrator, ComALERT/GRASP Kelly Burns, Case Manager, GRASP</p> <p>Human Resources Department Dana Martin, Performance Management Specialist</p> |

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| <p>NYC COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD 1 - BROOKLYN: T. Burrows</p> <p>NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – OFFICE OF ADULT & CONTINUING EDUCATION: J. Foster</p> <p>NYS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPERVISION: O. Wright (Queensboro)</p> <p>NYS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – ACCES-VR: W. Hersh</p> <p>NON-TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN: K. Brock</p> <p>NOVIANT: E. McFadden</p> <p>THE ORATORY OF ST. BONIFACE: Fr. A. Andreassi, M. Zeman, Fr. J. Warden</p> <p>THE OSBORNE ASSOCIATION: J. Dennis</p> <p>READY, WILLING & ABLE [SEE THE DOE FUND]</p> <p>THE RESOURCE COUNSELING CENTER: M. Gonzalez</p> <p>RIGHT HOUSING SOLUTIONS: R. Williams</p> <p>THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH: Rev. J. de Saussure <i>Robinson, Michael</i></p> <p>SERENDIPIDTY I: C. Bowden</p> <p>ST. PAUL COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH: Rev. L. Shannon</p> <p>VERTEX OUTPATIENT PROGRAM: E. Emery <i>Washington, Dr. Mary</i></p> <p>WESTCHESTER COUNTY RE-ENTRY TASK FORCE: B. Lambros</p> <p>WHEN PEOPLE WORK: A. Dixon</p> <p>WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS TRAINING INSTITUTE: B. Carmel</p> | |
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| ITEM | ITEM | DESCRIPTION AND ACTION ITEMS |
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| 1 | Call to Order | The meeting was called to order by Mr. Christopher R. Owens, KCRTF Co-Chair designate, at 12:30 pm. |
| 2 | Opening Remarks & Presentation of Minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Owens discussed participation with the KCRTF and the need for service providers to share information and their services. District Attorney Eric Gonzalez’s official administration commenced in January, including the Justice 2020 initiative – an effort to put together ideas for the new DA to consider as he moves forward. Mr. Owens introduced co-chair Kevin Uzzell (DOCCS). Mr. Uzzell introduced his colleagues and reiterated DOCCS’ commitment to successful re-entries for all of those coming home. Mr. Owens presented the minutes from the December 6th KCRTF meeting and requested corrections. |
| 3 | Introductions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendees introduced themselves and, when appropriate, the services delivered by their organizations. Clarence Bowden announced the publication of his new book regarding re-entry. |
| 4 | Coordinator’s Report | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In FY17, the KCRTF fell slightly short of goals. Program Administrator situation has not yet been finalized. FY18 Quarter 1 was productive with regard to intakes due to good case conferences with DOCCS. There is some attrition from the number who express interest in the KCRTF while on the inside and what happens once they get out. KCRTF offers two CBIs. One cohort of Thinking For A Change started in January and a Ready, Set, Work! cohort should be starting in February. T4C takes 12 weeks to complete, but RSW can be completed in 7 days (20 hours). Case Conference Committees still working on ways to incorporate more providers. Public Outreach Committee work is evolving for this year. Facility-based DOCCS staff members are becoming more familiar with the Task Force concept – slowly. Greater exposure is leading to more correspondence from individuals on the inside in advance of release. |
| 5 | Reports / Concerns | There were no reports presented or concerns discussed. |

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| <p>6</p> <p>Guest Presentations</p> <p><i>(Please note that the excerpts presented hear were transcribed from an audio recording and may contain errors. Please bring any issues to our attention.)</i></p> | <p>THEME: INCREASING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RE-ENTRY WITH A FOCUS ON HOUSES OF WORSHIP. “I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME NOT ...”</p> <p>Mr. Owens noted that various efforts are beginning to take shape to coordinate re-entry efforts in many ways across many fields. Starting the focus with houses of worship is a by-product of the number of entities who are involved with assisting people in need. This session is the beginning of a long conversation.</p> <p>Rev. Lesley Shannon, St. Paul’s Community Baptist Church. No formal structure at St. Paul’s for re-entry: The best practice to reintegrate someone into community is to reintegrate them into community – meeting people “where they are” with minimal religious emphasis. Addressing the needs of the individuals would be the best and fastest way to touch all aspects of their lives. Giving people a “safe space” to get comfortable with their new situation and to be able to “be heard.”</p> <p>Shannon is a former Corrections Officer; he was “a different kind of Corrections Officer.” He spent time with individuals coming home because “he was there” and could help those people feel better understood. Church communities often have a hard time “suspending judgement” with regard to formerly incarcerated individuals. “Being the space” was important, rather than “creating the space,” as a precursor to introducing individuals to the community at large.</p> <p>Ms. Greer Ellis, Abyssinian Baptist Church. Rev. Butts has been consistent in working on re-entry issues. Ellis runs the incarceration and re-entry ministry at Abyssinian. Ellis’ father, Eddie Ellis, was incarcerated for nearly 25 years; Ms. Ellis had a good relationship with her father (“He was an awesome Dad.”)</p> <p>General philosophy is “we are bigger than the biggest mistake we ever made.” Many of us made the same mistakes as those who are incarcerated – we just didn’t get caught. Correspondence with incarcerated individuals is a critical element of communication. Abyssinian has a 14-week program for re-entry that does not “force” people into a particular faith, but encourages people to connect with their own faiths and sources of strength. Openness and transparency are components of survival, as well as the use of restorative justice. Resources exist and their existence is communicated to those who are on the inside and/or who are experiencing the re-entry transition.</p> <p>Rev. Daryl Bloodsaw, First Baptist Church of Crown Heights. Bloodsaw started his re-entry work at Abyssinian. First Baptist has the Rephidim Ministry – a safe space for families of individuals who are or were incarcerated to address the “shame” factor. Bloodsaw teaches Old and New Testament at Sing Sing in a Masters program – every Monday morning. The exposure is powerful and “humanizing.” Overall, his students recognize that a mistake was made and want to have the opportunity to make things right. Those on the inside “lose belongingness” over time. It is hard to go back home to a place you don’t “belong to”.</p> <p><i>Example: An inmate being released to his home city of Rochester after 31 years who needed to hear that “it’s going to be hard” and to both keep the faith and the strength.</i></p> <p>Kevin Livingston, 100 Suits For 100 Men. Livingston has worked with clergy in different ways. Currently working with 45 men on Rikers Island – providing speakers, including celebrities, and classes in entrepreneurship and business practices. “Boutiques” are created to provide individuals with the opportunity to look good and feel good about himself (Example: 34 years incarcerated). Looking in the mirror after the suit and haircut makes the individual talk to the successful-looking person in front of him. 100 Suits also holds pop-up boutiques in difficult areas to open up minds of gang members and “at-risk” individuals who can do the right thing for themselves and do better for themselves, their families and their communities. Work with houses of worship is important. People coming home want to feel safe, that someone “has their back.” Housing and identification papers are critical issues on people’s minds.</p> <p><u>QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>Mr. Owens: What are the more formal actions that St. Paul’s and Abyssinian take to create the “be the community?” Ms. Ellis: Church has held many education sessions and speaker series, including a Bible series with Dr. Harold Trulear. What is clear is that people are impacted by incarceration but are struggling to deal with it. Authors include Michelle Alexander and Susan Burton. Donna Hylton spoke and presented her documentary addressing molestation and untreated trauma. Mr. Owens: Can I come to your church and talk to anyone? Ms. Ellis: The church is always open and people call on the cell phone at all times seeking help. The</p> |
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work is hard and not everyone is “serious,” but the church is actively engaged and available and services are accessible. There is a ministry of social workers who are members of the church.

Rev. Shannon: Shannon used to go into Queensboro regularly and witnessed “in-reach” – which he felt was very different and not as helpful in the long run. “You have to be intentional about this work and know what your limitations are.” The lesser level of structure at St. Paul’s has not lessened the Church’s effectiveness in helping people feel safe and create their own foundation. Shannon’s “in-reach” approach was to listen and assess needs, not to preach or sing a song or stand on ritual. The word of mouth around the ministry attracted participants. “It’s not about doing church; it’s about BEING the church.” “You have to be the agent of change in people’s lives.” “People don’t want to know how much you know until they know that you care.” Suspension of judgement is critical – and keeping one’s own life in front of you. “I can remember walking PAST St. Paul’s on my way to supply MY drug habit” and, “by the grace of God, I got to know God and I am able to help people today.” “Intentionality and transparency are critical because everyone has had to overcome something, but we don’t allow that story line to come forward because we have arrived.” “I am not better than anyone; I’m just a beggar trying to tell other beggars where to find bread.” “Doing church allows one to step aside to some extent, rather than being the church” and learning and acknowledging struggles. As one inmate told him, “if you haven’t lived on this side of the fence, then I really don’t care what you say” – which was a wake-up call.

Rev. Bloodsaw: The concept of the mirror is essential; not enough churches look in the mirror. We have confined church to the worship service. This goes against everything the Gospel is about. The definition of a church is a group of “called out” ones; we have to get out and up close and personal with people’s needs. Book *Crisis In The Village* identifies the need for the church to re-enfranchise those who have been disenfranchised through incarceration. Church is supposed to “be broken” through action. Jesus said simply “go.” We have sanitized what we say we believe into a social gathering, a Sunday morning high to carry us to the next Sunday.

Mr. Owens: What will First Baptist be doing differently in 5-10 years than it is doing today? Rev. Bloodsaw: We are all still “overcoming” and are always “becoming” – and that is not the past, it is the future. First Baptist is trying to imagine “who are we going to be when we grow up.” We have to make our building more inviting to those who are disconnected from their community, for example. We cannot “overspiritualize” the Gospel – which creates separations where separations were never meant to be. The Scriptures have to be used to “get dirty” in order to “get clean” and not just be a “top-shelf” treatment. First Baptist will hopefully have ministries both within the church and outside the church – and in the prisons.

Ms. Ellis: The “credible messenger” is important to provide hope and inspiration to those coming home. Abyssinian tries to pair up folks to allow reinforcement of the efforts and the successes.

Mr. Owens: In previous meetings, telling the stories was identified as an important part of the inspirational piece and strengthening connections.

Rev. Bloodsaw: Pastors have to come out of the pulpit, be more vocal and challenge elected officials more. Mass incarceration is a beast that requires intense work by the church leaders to change the structures.

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Mr. Hurley: Acknowledges mass incarceration as “a beast,” but feels complicit as a defense attorney for advising individuals to take pleas and become incarcerated. The system is set up to get people back into “the system.” Teachers and educational institutions need to know and teach about incarceration to children at a young age to prepare people to think and act differently.

Mr. Owens: Children take in traumatic experiences from all around them and process them. They can be influenced and strengthened.

Ms. Ellis: We must shed the negativity associated with incarceration and really believe that people can change and act like it. Language is powerful and can reinforce the negativity that we are trying to fight.

Mr. Blackman: “Keeping Up With The Joneses” undermines some people’s ability to sustain themselves economically. Our children are struggling with self-destructive values based on blind consumerism. The cycle has to be broken.

Mr. Livingston: 15-year veteran in financial industry. Financial literacy is so important. 100 SUITS teaches financial literacy at Rikers. Entrepreneurship is an important quality that can help to combat the negative effects of ignorance.

Mr. Ammendola: A man of faith who believes in the power of love. Operated a program that brought church members into prisons and incarcerated individuals into the church which had a very positive effect on all parties.

Bishop Belgrove: Attempted to bring pastors together to provide better service to the community. Has been working with NYPD (Sgt. Tiffany Brown) to target young people who are identified as “at risk” and get them the strong message that they can and should make better choices.

Pastor Parks: Chaplain of Trinidad prisons and a church pastor. Disconnection from families is a big problem. Using toys to have children send the message to incarcerated relatives that “we need you home.” When first started, was focused on Jesus. He quickly realized that this was inappropriate and unhelpful. Presenting instead examples of behavior that could link Jesus to the incarcerated residents. He determined that literacy was essential, so a program was started that combined ministry and literacy. Some releases were able to go straight into the University.

Mr. Robertson: Credible messengers are critical to success. Served nearly 36 ½ years. Re-entry is easy; reintegration is hard. Time in prison is traumatizing and creates a wellspring of trauma, anger and frustration that has to be truly addressed in order to prevent self-destruction and recidivism. The use of street codes and prison codes were never addressed while on the inside and during re-entry and they themselves become negative forces.

Rev. Bloodsaw: Going into prison, “the baggage you go in with is not the baggage you survive with.” A culture needs to be learned in order to survive. Attempted to design a course that would assist with the preparation of individuals for their re-entry transition. Program could not survive due to bureaucratic politics.

Rev. Shannon: Racism is the context of incarceration, just as it is for all institutional behavior. Everyone should take a course given by the **People’s Institute For Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshop**. Racism = race prejudice + power-based oppression rooted in race prejudice. We cannot engage in victim-blaming when we are not engaging the real conversation about racism. True national healing requires this real discussion; behaviors cannot be excused. The Bible says that a nation divided against itself shall come to ruin – and America is a sick nation.

Rev. de Saussure: Riverside Church is working with congregants on issues of privilege and racism and the ways in which we contribute to the worst aspects of “the system’s” operations.

Dr. Seward: Black congregants are prejudiced against the formerly incarcerated populations. Instant offenses mean “nothing.” It is the effort to reintegrate that needs to be treated honestly and lovingly. Supporting “tough on crime” approaches leads us down the wrong path.

Mr. Dixon: Most recidivism is based on parole violations, not real crimes. “Violent criminals” have low recidivism rates and are very credible messengers. Served 32 years. Hiring racism: Whites with felonies are more likely to be hired than Blacks without felonies. Myth of “The Re-entry Model”: Most of the folks who were incarcerated were ever “integrated into society” so how can they be “reintegrated?” Marginalization and traumatization have created “the real problems” that we are not addressing at the systemic level.

Mr. Hamilton: Served 32 years. Graduated from the NYTS Sing Sing Masters Program. Did not see congregations in the prisons. There needs to be a start of “re-entry” from the time/point of entry and an ongoing connection to the community – including the houses of worship. (Example: Church of Gethsemane’s programs.)

Mr. M. Robinson: Served 29 years. Prison is a society within a society. Coming home can be entrance into another prison. One organization succeed in helping: ComALERT. Work of Dr. Vanda Seward, Dr. LaNina Cook, and Norma Fernandes was critical. Needed to have the long-term investment of effort in order to succeed. Who’s coming to the prison and really talking to people?

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| | | <p>Ms. A. Jones: Mental health issues are not addressed adequately for many individuals coming home. Stigma is a big issue – paralleling the stigma of HIV. There are also many HIV-positive individuals coming home. Attitudes within the Black community need to be addressed as well as other issues.</p> <p>Min. Royall: We, as clergy, need real training to be the leaders we need to be. The congregations will follow the leader. The leaders must be among the people and changes must start at the top. This is a long, hard process.</p> <p>Mr. Isaac: Served 30 years. Paid attention to everything. Graduate of 2007 NYTS program. The political environment is not supportive of what needs to happen. We understand the cost of making it on the outside; “there is a co-pay.” ”We have been on the inside and we know how to demand that commitment from the folks who are not serious about change. “If I do this, how will it impact me? If it’s negative, it ain’t happenin’” That’s the message we have to give to them. We lost faith in the churches in the 1960s; if you are coming to the prisons, be PRESENT and we need some listening to take place, not just talking. “You have to treat this as a marathon, not a sprint; all you have to do is get there.”</p> <p>Mr. Wright: (DOCCS Queensboro) I didn’t get in trouble, because I saw the consequences, but I have walked the walk my whole life. Folks from the outside who were not incarcerated ARE respected – if they can relate -- and there are people doing real work. But when I went out to churches to discuss re-entry and working with them, I got rejected. “That’s not happening. We’re not hearing that!”</p> <p>Ms. Parker: Daughter’s non-profit works with children of incarcerated parents. We must be aware of a pipeline leading children from foster care to prison.</p> <p>Mr. Palmaro: NYPD and NYCDOE need to be present and meetings need to be videotaped.</p> <p>Mr. Owens: DOE is present; NYPD is on our mailing list and we are working on appropriate ways to use videos.</p> |
| 7 | New Business / Events | No new business was presented or discussed. |
| 8 | Adjournment | The meeting was adjourned at 2:56 pm. |

NEXT MEETING IS ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2018

2018 KCRTF meetings are proposed for 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm on these first Wednesdays

2018 Meetings: Apr 4, Jun 6, Aug 1, Oct 3, Dec 5

Please mark your calendars. Locations may vary.

Corrections to these Minutes should be emailed to OwensC1@BrooklynDA.org

Information pertaining to events should also be emailed