



# CRP California Reentry Program

## Letter from the Director

I find myself writing this at a peculiar confluence of issues affecting the program. As we see yet another warden retire from San Quentin in September, the state is facing the dual pressure of a court order to relieve prison overcrowding and a fiscal crisis that has grown too big to ignore. Not coincidentally, this is in the midst of a severe economic downturn that is affecting all sectors of California, including nonprofits.

Right when people - and especially prisoners - need services the most, both government and private funding is contracting, forcing the downsizing or closure of many worthy organizations that help our society's most needy.

With the prospect of thousands more of our incarcerated facing freedom, the question facing us as a society is: do we want to continue to spend millions of dollars to incarcerate or would we prefer to invest money in our communities' future by helping to transform our former prisoners into tax-paying citizens? This is more than just an economic issue; it is a public safety issue.

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## We Hear from a Former Client

*Porfie G. paroled from San Quentin in March, 2009. He attended advising at the California Reentry Program for several months before he was released.*

**Q: How did you hear about the California Reentry Program inside San Quentin?**

**A:** I was attending an ARC (Addiction Recovery Counseling) meeting and was referred to your program by the director, Rick Baez.

**Q: When did you start attending CRP, and how long was the process?**

**A:** I started coming to the Tuesday night CRP meetings about 3 months after I hit mainline. When Kristine (CRP adviser) moved to Thursday nights I moved also, and came every week that I could, for about 6 months until I was paroled.

**Q: How did we help you?**

**A:** I knew I wanted to change my life around. I had been offered opportunities within the walls of SQ to help me with those changes, such as addiction recovery. And I took advantage of them, and learned from them. CRP was another step in the right direction.

**Q: Specifically?**

**A:** I knew about a residential treatment program in the East Bay called Diablo Valley Ranch (DVR). They have a good reputation and a high

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*...without the dedication of service, and the commitment from... the California Reentry Program, I would not be where I am today.*

## CRP Announces New Collaboration to Prepare Clients to be Truck Drivers

One of the issues our clients face most often is finding gainful, legal employment. With a shrinking job market and employers consequently becoming more selective in hiring, opportunities with people with any kind of criminal history are few and far between. This often pushes our clients into lifestyles they would rather leave behind, but not having access to other options feel trapped into the cycle of crime and incarceration. California Reentry Program and Mochary Foundation have partnered to help address this.

Matt Mochary comes to San Quentin every week to teach clients to pass California's commercial driver's test, in preparation for a truck driving career. We are working with the prison to allow the foundation to pick up these clients the day they parole, pay their license fees, and get them into driver training, so there is no delay to their earning real money upon their release. Matt headed up such a program at Riker's Island jail in New York and we welcome his efforts with our clients. ☐

*Former client, continued from page 1*

success rate for clients who can get in to their program. Kristine made numerous calls to DVR and spoke with the leaders there, and found out that I had a really good chance of being accepted to the program. The dilemma was coming up with funding. With the California economy in the state it was, there was little available financing.

**Q: What happened?**

A: Allyson West (CRP executive director) and Kristine together made a huge effort for my benefit. They sent letters and e-mails and made numerous phone calls to county and state representatives. At first the response was slow and I almost gave up hope. There were other treatment programs out there that I could fall back on, but I was most optimistic about DVR.

**Q: And then?**

A: Literally, just days before my parole date, I got the good news! I was accepted to DVR, and the funding would be allocated. I could not have made it without Kristine and Allyson's help.

**Q: How do you feel now?**

A: I was able to stay at DVR for 120 days. It was an enriching and eye-opening experience. I'm clean and sober, and have an excellent gig working in construction. I was able to get my old job back with a former employer, because of the program.

**Q: Any other comments?**

A: Honestly, I cannot stress enough that without the dedication of service, and the commitment from Allyson and Kristine at the California Reentry Program, I would not be where I am today. They advocated for me, they believed in me, they kept me on track when I was feeling despondent. And months later, after proving that I am capable of change, a friendship has bonded. I will be forever grateful! ☐



All photos courtesy Arthur Chang

## Some valuable insight from Tom, a long-time volunteer...

Being retired from paid employment, I was auditing a course at the University of California in Berkeley. In a 2003 edition of one of the campus newspapers, I read about the Prison University Project at San Quentin Prison, accredited through Patten College in Oakland. The article said that volunteers were needed, so I contacted the director and for the next three years I worked with that program, mainly helping with Spanish language instruction.

When the education building closed because of the need to construct a new hospital, and classes had to move to the temporary buildings near the ball field, a lot of classes, including Spanish, were dropped because of lack of classroom space. At that point, after talking with the director, Allyson West, I transferred to the California Reentry Program and have been working with them ever since, at first in the lower yard area and for the last year or so mostly in H-Unit.

*"To those who are thinking of volunteering at San Quentin, I say 'go for it.' "*

Many years ago I had visited a prison in Ohio, so I was somewhat familiar with arrangements such as the sally-port, multiple sign-ins, and other security measures. Being familiar with the usual cell arrangement, I was surprised at my first visit to H-Unit to find 1000 men living in five 200-man dormitories, with upper and lower bunks. That is a lot of togetherness.

Working with prisoners is similar to working with clients in any clinical or educational setting. The most important thing to remember is that they are individuals, and that one size doesn't fit all. True, they have to adapt to certain institutional structures while in the prison, and to other structures if they get out on parole. Our job, as I see it, is to help inmates get any possible benefit out of organizations and resources inside and outside the prison to help them make a successful (permanent) transfer into society. We volunteers have to try to research and to recommend possible resources depending on the wants, needs, and capabilities of the individual inmates.


The most difficult assignment is to give meaningful help to lifers. In the present political climate in California, it is really hard for them to get a parole date or to have it honored if they do get one. We can help them gather and organize scenarios which they plan to present to the parole board, if given the opportunity. Connecting them to continuing education opportunities is always useful, even for those who will have to spend many more years in prison.

We need prisons. Some people present a physical danger to society and need to be segregated. However, I feel that in American society this concept has gotten completely out of hand. We waste enormous resources trying to enforce a death penalty that in my opinion is both wrong and ineffective and should be abolished. Too many people are being sentenced to prison terms which are too long. Not everything which is wrong should be considered a crime. And too many crimes are classified as felonies, rather than misdemeanors. If confinement is necessary, for shorter periods, it could be served in county jails. Also, drug use is stupid, but it should not be a cause for revocation of parole and return to the prison setting.



We know that most prison inmates will be released to parole. It is in their interest and in the general interest of society that they be prepared for reentry, so they will be less likely to screw up again. Yet they are not adequately prepared for parole. People leave who are expected to get a job. Yet they do not even have a driver's license, which they will need for work. Surely it could be worked out again, as it apparently was in the past, that most leave prison with a current license. If they need DUI classes or traffic school, this could all be done at the prison while they are serving their sentences. Those who absolutely don't qualify for a driver's license

could be provided with a valid California picture ID, rather than leaving with a prison ID and discharge papers.

To those who are thinking of volunteering at San Quentin, I say "go for it." You will be giving necessary help to a population that needs it, while developing your own tolerance for frustration and your appreciation of the complex needs of our society. The best educational opportunity at San Quentin is the one that we volunteers get. 

## Letter from the director, continued...

According to the CDCR, 85% of all California prisoners one day walk free. The average time served in a California prison is a little more than two years. Imagine the difference if those people left prison with homes, jobs, and feasible prospects for the medical and mental health care they needed. In these times of budget cuts, fewer programs are available to state prisoners. With diminishing rehabilitative programs available, reentry services provided by private nonprofits are more vital than ever.

We are facing significant cutbacks in our program in 2010 and need your support for our work to continue. We thank our supporters for your ongoing contributions!

Allyson West, Executive Director

### What your donation buys:

- \$ 5 paper and pencils for one month of the program
- \$ 8 cost of shipping and handling a box of parole clothing
- \$ 30 copies of materials for 5 clients paroling to Alameda County
- \$100 time and materials for a workshop
- \$150 set of 100 evaluation postcards
- \$700 six months of training expense for new volunteers



**\$500 will get your name as a major donor at CRP events and on publications**

Support for the California Reentry Program comes from individual donations and foundations including the San Francisco Foundation, van Loben Sels/RembeRock and Next Fund

California Reentry Program  
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