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Jail Program Helps Rebuild Life's "Foundation"

A soft-spoken man, German loves to bake and is so good at it he earned the nickname, "Cake Boss." The name didn't come from his work in a bakery or restaurant but from detention officers at the St. Lucie County jail.

German is one of many success stories to graduate from the Journey Forward Re-entry Program established by 19th Circuit Public Defender Diamond Litty. Now a free man, German is a Cook Supervisor employed by Aramark Correctional Services. But getting there wasn't easy. At 39 years old he admits to a long history of drug use, multiple felony arrests and several stays in prison as well as jail.

"When I came here I was ready to change and so glad the program was available," said German. In fact, one of the program's eligibility requirements is a genuine desire to achieve a more productive lifestyle. "I've done more in the past three years to improve myself than I've done my entire life."

Established in 2003, the "Re-entry Program" has expanded into a modified Therapeutic Community now called "The Journey Forward Re-entry Program" licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). Journey Forward is a collaborative effort between law enforcement, DCF and other community agencies serving St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River and Okeechobee counties. Specifically, the program includes a 90-day curriculum taught directly in a segregated jail pod using a cognitive behavioral approach to addiction and recovery, which includes techniques such as trauma informed care and motivational interviewing.

Recently the St. Lucie County jail held a graduation ceremony for 74 inmates enrolled in four of its jail-based programs.

Learning to Change Attitudes

A voluntary program for men and women, clients learn to recognize how their emotional and behavioral reactions have been imprinted on their life and how they have nurtured and programmed those imprints into their addictive and criminal thinking.

Inmate Arthur agrees. "When I look back on how I acted before I came here, I was mad at the world and so arrogant. I blamed all my problems on other people and also said I would never, ever, ever go to a drug treatment program."

Arthur, 51, has since graduated from three of the jail's programs; Journey Forward, the Spiritual Learning program and the In2Work Culinary program, a partnership with Aramark. He's been working in the jail kitchen for about 10 months and is proud to have assisted with several outside catering events. Although he has a college degree, Arthur's addiction took him down the wrong path but like many individuals with a substance use disorder, also included periods of recovery and even marriage. Like German, he credits the jail and program staff with his current success.

"Major (Patrick) Tighe is down to earth, he's a disciplinarian but every day he shakes your hand and will tell you it's going to be alright," said Arthur. "Captain (William) Lawhorn and Major Tighe – you just can't get better fellows," he smiled. Lawhorn is Assistant Director of Detention.

Tighe, Director of Detention at the jail, says the program not only helps reduce recidivism, it has helped create a behavior modification atmosphere at the jail resulting in fewer officer assaults. Inmates are on their best behavior in an effort to qualify for the programs.

Arthur talks with Gail Cordial about his participation in the St. Lucie Program



Robert is another believer. Robert, 41, who spoke at the graduation ceremony, told his fellow graduates the program helped him build a new foundation for his life in recovery. An addict for 30 years, he took his first drink at age 11. Although he had succeeded in a prior treatment program Robert said he didn't address the underlying cause of his addiction until recently. Having suffered abuse at a very young age he had not dealt with the anger and behavioral issues the abuse triggered. That behavior resulted in his first jail sentence and enrollment in Journey Forward.

"After being in jail for 10 days, I had to make a decision, where do I want to go with my life? Entering the drug dorm, I was scared. Scared I was not going to make it, wondering, can I do this again?"

Long-term Success

At the recent graduation ceremony, Tighe (pictured below) highlighted the positive impact of the jail's programs: the recidivism rate for individuals who participated in a program during incarceration is 15% compared to 33% for those who were not in a program. For those in the culinary program, the recidivism rate dropped to 10 percent.

According to Kristen Bracken, Re-Entry Director for the Public Defender's Office, a Re-entry Specialist meets with eligible clients and develops an individualized Re-entry Plan to assist them in areas of need. In addition to substance abuse, clients learn skills assisting them with such things as parenting, physical fitness, and anger management."

If needed, clients can also enroll in the Indian River State College (IRSC) GED program which prepares them to take the GED exam. The GED program also receives high praise from its graduates.



"I had a hard time with math and writing," said German, "so sometimes Miss (Kimberlee) Taylor would have to come into the (jail) kitchen and force me to sit down with her, but she never gave up on me."

When asked by her supervisor at IRSC if she would be interested in working at the jail, Taylor decided to give it a try. That was 17 years ago. The satisfaction she gets from the success of her students is hard to beat.

"There's a real transformation when someone gets their high school diploma," Taylor explained. And her students have come to

rely on the guidance and support she provides. When she shakes the hand of graduates, they often don't want to let go or they ask, "when's the next class?" and she has to remind them they have completed the program. Since data tracking began for the GED program in 2010, 402 students have tested and 203 have passed the GED exam.

Adding to Journey Forward's success says Bracken, is the community-based Alumni program. Graduates are invited to attend weekly Alumni groups where they receive peer support and activities to assist them with the transition into the community such as housing, transportation, mental health and substance abuse treatment, vocational testing and more. Individuals previously incarcerated, but not participants of Re-entry can receive resource referrals from peer counselors located in the Ft. Pierce Public Defender's Office and CORE Probation office.

Forward from Here

Determination to change their lives is a recurring theme among Journey Forward graduates and echoed by Tighe in his graduation remarks, "true happiness is a direct result and consequence of your actions."

German participated in the Alumni program for over a year upon his release and credits its peers and services with helping him stay on track. After graduating from the jail programs, German had a prison sentence to serve but his desire to change his life left an impression on the jail staff. Upon his release he tapped into the Alumni program and with the recommendation of Major Tighe and St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara he was hired for his current position with Aramark. They still talk about a cake he once made as a thank you that included the Sheriff's insignia.

Robert, who graduated from Journey Forward in March, plans to tap into the Alumni program and a referral to supportive housing after his upcoming release. During his remarks he gave a special thank you to jail staff Dr. Colette, Elaine, Misty, Quintina, Nicole and Valentina for “caring enough to help me, push me and have faith in me.”

As for Arthur, he looks forward to the day he can care for his 3-year old son who currently lives with Arthur’s mother, a retired teacher. Arthur says, “I should be taking care of her, not the other way around.” He believes his newly acquired culinary skills and self-care techniques will make that a reality.



See below for more details about the Journey Forward Re-entry Program or click here [click here](#) for online information.

For more information about Florida Partners in Crisis go to www.flpic.org

Journey Forward Re-entry Program

The Journey Forward Program is a 90 day psycho-educational program which targets male and female inmates from the ages of 18 and above. The program utilizes evidence-based practices such as CBT, MI, MET and DBT.

The program topics include:

Substance Abuse
Anger Management
Life Skills
Effective Communication
Vocational Assessment
Trauma Informed Care
Co-occurring D/O
Domestic Violence
Parenting Classes
HIV Education/Testing
Healthy Start

On site services offered: Placement in Treatment and Halfway houses
Referrals to Mental Health Services
Life Builder Backpacks
Bus Tickets and other transportation needs
Placement in other jail programs (Culinary, GED, Spiritual Dorm)

Off site services offered: Re-entry Group which assists with needs outside the jail:

Housing
Transportation
Treatment
Mental Health Providers
Vocational Testing
Resume Writing
Food Stamps
Applying for SSI and other benefits
Relapse Prevention

In an average 90 day cycle the Journey Forward Re-entry Program may service well over 120 inmates with only approximately 20 graduating from the program. Many inmates leave the program early due to being either released from jail or sentenced to DOC. For these inmates, the Re-entry Group is their link to services and the community.

The goal of the Journey Forward Re-entry Program is to assist inmates by identifying risk factors and offering direction and services to decrease said risk factors and increase protective factors.

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