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# INSIGHTS

Offender Preparation & Education Network, Inc.

## College Bound: A Vehicle for Change

by Denwood Barksdale, English Department Chair,  
Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center, Richmond, Virginia

*The Virginia Department of Correctional Education states that it now costs \$9,375 to incarcerate a youngster within its system for one year. During the time of his commitment, then, it would make sense to do whatever is necessary to turn a ward's life around. The College Bound Program is an excellent way to reach a sizeable percentage of our youth behind prison walls. I encourage you to take the initiative to implement one in your facility.*

It seems like just yesterday when I suggested to my student assistant that he continue his studies at a college or university. He was, after all, well qualified: he had earned a General Education Diploma; was very knowledgeable and well spoken; and, he was organized! He kept my desk in order and my teaching supplies well stocked.

Surely, I told him, he should take steps to pursue his education.

Surprisingly, he had not even considered the idea. Maybe it was the limited support he received from his family, or it could have been his incarcerated state. It might have been his precarious financial situation, or a combination of all these circumstances. I don't know why. But he did become interested in the idea after I presented it to him. In fact, working toward his acceptance by the community college of his choice became our major project. Before the young man went home, through our collaboration he was accepted by a two-year institution in his hometown.

We did not think about it at the time, but his success had come through our joint endeavor. This young man was the first one ever to leave us and go directly on to an institution of higher learning. I thought no more about the impact of my involvement with his post-secondary studies until after he had gone and, suddenly,

other students (he had apparently informed) bombarded me asking that I help them do the same. To each, I pledged my assistance and, before I knew it, there were a large number of potential students waiting for my help.

At that point, I knew an organized program would have to be developed if I were to

comfortably assist them. A program that was to change the lives of many juvenile offenders through higher academics was about to be born. Lannett Brailey, my principal at the time, embraced the idea and pledged her support. It was she who, a few days later, affectionately named it the *College Bound Program*. The name stuck.

Walter MacFarlane, our state superintendent, was also enthused about it, and gradually it became recognized, and in some cases adopted, by correctional institutions throughout Virginia as

*(continued on page 2)*

**Today, the six-year-old program boasts approximately 210 acceptance letters, and at least 31 participants have entered colleges, universities, or trade schools.**

*OPEN is striving to collect insights from ex-offenders who are currently serving as treatment providers in adult corrections.*

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well as in other parts of the United States. Today, the six-year-old program boasts approximately 210 acceptance letters, and at least 31 participants have entered colleges, universities, or trade schools. Fourteen courses are proctored on campus and there are five more students awaiting the arrival of their correspondence material. Of the 495 past and present participants, there have only been seven recidivists.

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**Many do nothing in the classroom because they feel it would be pointless to earn an OED or High School Diploma.**

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Throughout my 16 years as a correctional educator, I've repeatedly observed that society has its share of individuals who have, in one way or another, dismissed the incarcerated community as hopeless. And many of those behind prison walls are painfully aware of it. Unfortunately, I've seen more than my share of this population whose actions suggest that mainstream America's negative opinions are correct. Cursing is a vital part of their vocabularies. Extreme anger and depression overshadow their personalities. Many do nothing in the classroom because they feel it would be pointless to earn an OED or High School Diploma.

However, when they really believe there is hope for them, attitudes change, cursing decreases and in many cases vanishes completely. Heads are lifted and smiles replace scowls. Talk of selling drugs on the corner turns to conversations about passing the SAT, which they can take at our facility through the *College Bound Program*. Emerging in the midst of our incarcerated community is a group of youngsters sincerely proud of their institutional accomplishments and enthusiastic about their futures. Often, their college-related dreams are all they really have had. So they prepare daily to enter their chosen institutions of advanced learning. As a whole, through the years these students have become role models for others. They carry themselves

proudly, and one by one, when they leave us they're ready for higher academia.

"B'dale, I made it," one young man happily announced during a phone call to me, shortly after arriving at the campus of the school that he had worked so hard to attend. "I'm here!"

"It was almost too much," another *College Bound* participant told me after he had toured his school for the first time.

My former assistant is now an office manager for a company in the State of Virginia. Others are destined to follow his success. I just received word that a young man who left us a few months ago has been notified of his Dean's List achievement after his first semester attending the school of his choice.

Through our institution's former volunteer coordinator, Christopher Moore, a Scholarship Committee was formed on campus to address our participants' needs during their quests for educational advancement. Needs are being met as a result of this organization's community outreach.

I take the viewpoint of Lorraine Monroe – administrator, educator, author, lecturer, and Frederick Douglas Academy founder – who says that we as educators must go far beyond the ordinary on our jobs, if those who have been entrusted to us are to reach their highest potentials. I also share her belief that we, as educators, must recognize we have been sent as an "incredible interruption" in the lives of those around us who have voids we can fill. A *College Bound Program* will do this in your institution. I encourage you to do your share in making it a reality.

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## Community Reintegration Project - Maui, Hawaii

By Tom Blackburn Rodriguez; MEO, Inc.

A *Community Reintegration Forum* held in Maui, Hawaii on November 16, 2000 focused on local efforts to help offenders reintegrate into the community after they complete their terms of incarceration. Ned Rollo, executive director of OPEN, INC., was keynote speaker at the event sponsored by Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc., the County of Maui, Maui County Correctional Center, and the U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections. More than 50 representatives of local human service organizations, the faith-based community, and government agencies participated.

Maui Mayor James "Kimo" Apana addressed the forum pledging his support for the reintegration efforts being undertaken by local community-based organizations. He stated, "We must see the people, who have made mistakes, served their time and are now coming home, as if they are members of our family."

The concern underlying the meeting was public safety – how it is affected by persons released from the Maui Community Correctional Center and how community agencies can respond to offenders' needs and thus influence their reintegration into the community. The forum highlighted problems arising when offenders return to a community that is unprepared to meet them with the necessary continuum of support services, drug treatment programs, educational opportunities, job training, and parole staffing sufficient to allow for intensive case management.

The meeting identified many problems faced by offenders returning to the community, including:

- Drug addiction and the need for treatment
- Lack of basic living skills
- Lack of education
- No prospects for employment – and the need for job training
- No jobs for them – employers are not willing to hire them
- The drastic change from an authoritarian environment to one of

individual responsibility •Return to the environment that contributed to their institutionalization •Loss of identity and culture, particularly among native Hawaiians, who make up the largest percentage of the Hawaii prison population.

To respond effectively, better coordination is needed among community agencies serving this population. Services now are fragmented, with the warden and his staff constantly receiving requests for interaction with inmates via classes, visits, prayer groups, education, and cultural sessions.

There was general agreement that unless the community takes the

lead there will continue to be fragmentation of services and a high recidivism rate among this population. It is also likely that the system will continue to contribute to the alienation and social dysfunction of the group.

At the conclusion of the event, a local initiative was set in motion to explore development of a community reintegration project. Under the leadership of MEO, Inc., this ad-hoc effort will seek funding and partnerships with private funding sources, government, and other non-profit organizations, including the Maui faith-based community.



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