**Where We’ve Come From**

**By: Augie Ghilarducci**

During my time of incarceration I primarily worked in the education department of two different prisons. One of my responsibilities was to instruct classes to fellow inmates. There were limited classes available so I began to create my own curriculum including handouts, summaries, and worksheets. When I was seven done I created about 100 courses that were taught in a classroom setting.

About five years remaining on my sentence, I started to seriously think about my reentry into society. I was aware of the challenges by what I witnessed over many years, watching men get released from prison only reach only to return six months, one year, even three years later. I'm ashamed to say that in the beginning I would be angry with them. I had a mountain of time left to do and these guys got their chance and blew it. then I came to understand many didn't really stand a chance. Limited current skills and opportunities for employment, no stable housing, battling addiction issues, and a limited support network.

I learned of the barriers and challenges facing us upon on reentry Through conversations and horror stories about what awaited me. Armed with this information and full of fear I begin to journal and create plans for reentry, anticipating these barriers, and identifying where I needed help and where that help might be available. I began to share this information with some of my friends. Ultimately, I created a course, values align goal setting, which I instructed through the education department. The course became very popular and prison staff made it a mandatory component of the treatment plans in the federal drug treatment program.

I never expected reentry to become my career. Now that it is, I can't imagine doing anything else. I had the great fortune of arranging a job in the prison visiting room. (One thing about incarceration, it completely removes the fear of talking to anyone about anything anywhere.) I was serving as the director of training for an executive search and staffing firm in Chicago. The owner of the company, Mike Owens, wanted me to meet his father, Tom Owens who had established the Cara program helping individuals find employment. During our Lunch meeting Mr Owens asked me if he could help me. I told him I would be honored and he introduced me by email to Cook County sheriff Tom dart. I was invited to a meeting at Cook County jail, the largest single site jail in the world. I was asked to bring any materials that I had related to the courses I was instructing while incarcerated.

I showed up for the meeting in a room filled with sheriffs. They made copies and passed out the material and asked me my story and how the program came to be. Before the meeting ended They told me they had nothing like that available to their inmates and asked if I'd be willing to help them out by instructing the programs on the inside. And they made clear that there was no money in the budget to pay for the work.

I knew at some point that I wanted to give back and help the incarcerated population, but I thought it might be too soon. I had only been released four months prior and the thought of going back behind razor wire was still very fresh. I got in touch with them several days later and told them that I was ready to do the work. 2nd Opportunity was born.

I met Dan Effrein while I was working at the staffing firm shortly after I started inside Cook County Jail. He was interested in the work I was doing in the mission up helping others to get a second chance in their lives. the decision was made to create second opportunity and to expand the work throughout the Chicago land area. Dan arranged for us to have an office, a website, and the ability to operate like a company.

Over time our clients grew to include Kane County jail, Kendall County jail, Woodford county jail, Grundy County Jail, Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center, Life House, West Care, Cara Chicago, and the Illinois Department of Corrections.

I refined some of the original programs, the internet is wonderful, and developed new programs based on my lied experience of re-entry and navigating barriers as a part of the process. We were able to build a network allowing us to help place returning men and women into jobs and refer them to places for both emergency shelter and permanent housing situations.

The work has really opened my eyes to the depth of the problem and the clear realization that there is no one solution. However I firmly believe that any solution must include those of us with lived experience sitting at the table as different ideas are being discussed. There are certain numbers that stick with me which cast a bright light on the horrific outcomes of the current reentry paths

* Fill in four or five hard hitting statistics

2nd Opportunity Has continued to fight for a seat at the table and a voice in the conversations. The relaunch of this website positions us to provide hope, support, and guidance for those yet to come down the path.