

THE SANKOFA MIGRATION

AN OFFICIAL BLACK PRISONERS CAUCUS NEWSLETTER

SET-POINT IS HERE!!

Reentry Revitalized

Set-Point, BPC's new reentry program, has been officially approved by WSP administration!

The Set-Point program is a reentry program with the purpose of helping incarcerated individuals realize their value prior to release from prison. Our goal is to bring every incarcerated individual to "Set-Point" *before* their release. Being at "Set-Point" means that an individual has reached a level where they are able to sustain themselves financially, enabling them to manage all of their responsibilities. We call anything less than Set-Point, "**living in a tent.**"

Set-Point will be an approx. 8-week class covering a wide range of issues, from goal setting and time

management, all the way to technology and personal finance. The class will be open to all inmates no matter what their time structure is.

There are 4 principles all set-point facilitators have adopted and strive to exemplify;

1: *Every individual has value.* Anyone and everyone is accepted into the set-point program. There is zero discrimination or exclusion. Set-point is changing the narrative; we believe our energy needs to be focused on rehabilitating *all* incarcerated individuals.

2: *Normalization is reentry.* The set-point team realizes the importance of normalizing institutional environments and situations, in order to begin a successful transition back into society. The further we take someone away from society and cultural norms, the further that person must go to reacclimate *into* that society. Such an effect is the antithesis of the societal goals *of* incarceration. Encouraging normalization best provides people with the tools they need to be prepared for real-life interactions.

3: *Reentry is rehabilitation.* The reentry committee vehemently stresses the need for reentry efforts to be directly tied to rehabilitative efforts *during* incarceration. Punishment and retribution are counter-productive to the goal of rehabilitating people and rebuilding communities.

4: *Teamwork works.* The set-point team, the Reentry committee, and the BPC as a whole, understand how vital it is that we create positive spaces with the DOC staff, counselors, navigators, administration, *and* the community around us. Only with everyone working together can positive interactions and successful transitions into the community become possible.

The set-point program is designed to embody the monumental shift in the way reentry is thought about and approached. Our reentry committee is extremely excited to share this program with WSP, and any other institutions that believe in rehabilitating *human beings*, to ensure a successful reintegration process.

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REENTRY'S RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

Prompt Support and Service in Crunch-Time

Our reentry committee has been hard at work, reaching out to the incarcerated population nearing release and providing them with the tools and resources necessary for a successful reentry. We have classified those getting out in 6 months or less as “rapid response” situations. We call them “rapid response”, because they don't have enough time to reach their set-point. Therefore, we *must* ensure that they have every possible resource so that their release does not lead to recidivism.

In the past few weeks, members of the rapid response team have been working with Dennis Conner, an individual whose release date was scheduled to be in early December of this year. When Mr. Conner was informed that his release date had been unexpectedly pushed up to the end of October, he was filled with joy, as well as anxiety. With everything he had prepared for with the reentry team being set for the beginning of December, he wondered if this new release date might disrupt his plans. Dennis came to one of our rapid response team members and expressed his concerns. Immediately the reentry team got to work, personifying the very meaning of “rapid-response”, and took measures to make sure Mr. Conner could get safe and reliable housing (a major issue for most individuals releasing), as well as vouchers for food, clothing, and transportation.

When asked about his thoughts on the rapid response team, Dennis stated that, “[the team] really gave me a better look at what I was gonna do when I got out, like a better mind-set on who I was gonna be.” Reentry can be an extremely stressful experience, even for those with resources that most

don't have. Obtaining those resources PRIOR to release, is a huge step in any successful reentry. “It was relieving knowing I would have the resources to get what I need when I do get out... When my release date changed, it wasn't a huge difference, but it definitely surprised me. During my whole incarceration I never had anything positive happen to me from DOC, so it yeah, it was exciting.”

Frustration with the lack of adequate reentry support being provided to individuals nearing their release dates has been a reoccurring theme in the response team's intake interviews. “Honestly my counselors and DOC didn't do anything for me, I had no resources or any kind of help 'til you guys came up to me with reentry resources and everything. Yeah you guys helped me out a lot, I was super nervous about hitting the streets with nothing. Now I've had interviews with [my county's] reentry navigator about everything I need, supplies, food, transportation, a phone, really everything I need man” The Reentry team is willing to provide this much needed support to ANYONE who needs it. We are proud to help enable individuals feel empowered and hopeful about reintegration. “I'm feeling excited and nervous about being free. I've been given the resources I need, now I need to follow the guidelines to be successful.”

We will be reaching out to Dennis, and look forward to having updates on his progress in future issues!!



POEMS & ARTWORK

Artistic Expressions

The Word

Men and Women and even the children,
The world and all that lives in it
Bring forth your fruit and let it be
filling,
Bring forth your love to heal a whole village,
Stand up and shine with the light that was
given, Freedom is calling freedom is living.
-Abel Linares-Montejo

Mental Warfare

Caged inside of my own brain
Is a wave of tsunami proportions,
As I ride with only the thrill to stay alive
With fear of my consumption
Deep endz, to deep thoughts,
Even the shallowest waters
Can cause maximum misfortune
So I stay balanced like still water,
But even lake Earie can have you haunted
Taunted by doubt has my vision not quite clear.
So as I see through my eyes
It's like a blind man leading the way,
In-tune with only intuition
But even Stevie Wonder couldn't play the keys to
this composition,
Composure has me sane
Like the old man on the porch with his cane
That hasn't never seen or set foot on a plane,
Does that mean I'm headed nowhere?
But this life that I'm livin'
Has driven my drive,
To want to go from a hooptie to a Mercedes-Benz,
But does it really matter the ride,
cuz if there is no gas in the car
I guesss I'm already trippin'.
So I go to tie my shoes
But these Velcro's remind me I'm trapped in prison,
As I wait for release like cuffs for the keys,
Bus tickets, 40 dollars,
Only then I feel relief,
But the only way out is a man who has faith to see,
That as he thinketh
Only then can he believe
-Stephen Boone #889089

Forever my grace

You've healed me in points I felt ceased
to my knowing.
Your intentions forever pure.
Curious to why you did,
But never concerned.

You wanted me to be deep,
So I gave you my mind,
My soul
My being.

Eternally grateful for giving me a new
breath to experience.

Your existence constantly giving me
purpose.

Impacts on me greater than a religion,
Love greater than a new birth.
Expressing your worth to me,
Forever my grace

-Love, Mitchell Heng

Positive News in the House of Blues

No cheers for un-celebratory tears,
How many years, til I can rejoin my peers,
It appears, we're waiting til the path clears...

But until then, while my environment is sin,
I'll shine as if a gem, and on my face I'll wear a grin...

Are you confused, to hear positive news, from the
house of blues, you thought we were all fools...

At this moment of momentary momentum, I
want my congratulatory mentions, take a pause...
suspension, listen, I'm content with my agenda.

-Cooke

Wats Freedom

devastated, Emasculated,
dehumanized & petrified,
conditional precursors to a revolutionary suicide,
activism, pragmatism,
now or never, do or die,
fortified identities cause where I'm at isn't who am I,
fortified my amenities to distract myself from the pain inside,
woke up early just to show up late, like my watch on colored people time,
a road to hell paved w good intentions, tryna push opinions that's color blind,
maybe freedom's being numb inside,
or not havin to take a gun inside,
not thinkin bout the otherside, the alternative, no tears to cry,
maybe its havin abundant time,
or not movin when u kno its time,
maybe its havin no regrets, no remorse, havin no respect,
never a coulda, shoulda, woulda, never thinkin in retrospect...

maybe it's all of the above, or maybe none at all,
right when u think u got it figured out, u slip n start to fall,
confusing liberty for freedom from the other side of the wall,
where the grass is always greener, and the cups are always half full.

-C.G.

GET TO KNOW OUR SPONSORS

Ms. Linda Scott, the face of the STAR project

Ms. Linda Scott was born and raised in the small logging town of St. Maries Idaho. Coming from such humble beginnings, Ms. Scott not only developed an unmatched work ethic and strong sense of community, but also an intense desire to spread her wings. After a short stint at a local community college, Linda's sense of curiosity and adventure encouraged her to leave Idaho in search of greener pastures.

When a contemplated career change caused her to become cognizant of her then, lack of a

college degree, Linda was determined to overcome this obstacle. She decided to enroll at George Fox University, Portland Campus, to continue her undergrad degree. In 2016, Ms. Scott graduated with a 3.97 GPA, earning her bachelor's degree in Management and Organizational Leadership, with a minor in Healthcare Administration.

After graduation, seeking a smaller community and different opportunities, Ms. Scott decided to move to Walla Walla, WA. Finding herself in a

small, close-knit community once again, she felt compelled to contribute. Ready for a change in career paths, she applied for a job with the Walla Walla Community College's (WWCC) North Campus, located at the Washington State Penitentiary (WSP).

A couple months later, WWCC called and offered her the position. Now she was able to start taking steps towards change.

Her starting position at WSP was teaching "Math for the Trades", not her first choice.

Nonetheless, she persevered and was eventually offered to teach an Adult Basic Education/GED class. Teaching the GED class opened her eyes to how frustrating it was to simply go over tests and forms, without actually appealing to people's learning styles. Ms. Scott got the opportunity to teach HS+ (High School +), an opportunity for students to earn their High School Diploma instead of a GED. With HS+, she could actually "teach students to how they learn". She began to see real results, "my students were actually engaged in the material".

While very proud of her accomplishments, and those of her students, Ms. Scott again found herself asking "what more can I do?" Believing in the powerful combination of education plus lived experience, the answer seemed to be to get more education. Linda decided to enroll in Arizona State University's master's program, studying sociology. As part of her program's last semester, Linda worked with a local non-profit focused on providing reentry support and services. That non-profit was Walla Walla's own STAR Project. The Star Project was and still is, the sole reentry resource center in Walla Walla.

Utilizing her skills in project management and organization, Ms. Scott turned her short stint at volunteering into a career, when she was voted in as the new Executive Director. In

September of 2022, she left WWCC to take the position at STAR, and ended the year with a bang when in December, she graduated from Arizona State University, earning her Masters degree with a 4.0 GPA.

At STAR, Linda went straight to work learning the business, and the programs, in order to rebuild the organization. Ms. Scott believes that hiring people that can personally identify with who they're helping, produces the most effective results, and that community building is key to STAR's success. She proudly calls having the ability to give people such opportunities "the icing on the cake". Linda continues to be dedicated to keeping the doors open for STAR and getting people what they need. She's focused on changing how people are treated, and strives to continue to change the dynamic of how reentry is approached. ANYONE who walks into the STAR Project is guaranteed to be treated with kindness and respect, regardless of what services can be offered.

Networking for STAR, and as always, trying to contribute to social justice, she attended the final presentation of Whitman college's Restorative Justice class in spring of 2023. It was here where she was invited to a WSP Black Prisoners Caucus (BPC) general meeting by the amazing Ms. Mary Moss.

At the general meeting, Linda was moved by the sincerity and dedication expressed by the members. The question posed for every person in attendance was, "what does community mean to you?". This really spoke to Ms. Scott, lighting a fire inside of her. When it came to the goals of the Reentry Committee specifically, they coincided with *everything* that STAR project was currently trying to achieve. Promoting education, building positive communities, working with and *servicing* the entire community around us, ***this was part of her vision!*** This meeting had great influence on Ms. Scott's decision to be our Reentry sponsor, and we could not express more gratitude to have her support and partnership.

Moving forward, Ms. Scott and her team want STAR to grow to its full potential. Reducing barriers and biases in the community requires education and input from all affected parties.

When reflecting on some of the lessons learned in her work in service to justice involved communities, she poignantly quipped "If you're not willing to walk with the people you're helping, then you need to take a look at your motivation" The words of a valuable ally, for sure.



For more information on the STAR project visit www.thestarproject.us or contact Linda Scott at (509)-525-3612

IS NORWAY THE ROADMAP TO SUCCESS?

Building a Better Future

The status of America's criminal justice system has been a point of harsh criticism coming from nearly every other developed nation in recent history. We've all heard the numbers before; roughly 2.3 million U.S. citizens are incarcerated at any given time. According to 2012 Bureau Justice statistics, 70% of formerly incarcerated individuals were arrested again within 5 years. Washington State's own stats are just as alarming. 68% of formerly incarcerated people reoffend within the first 3 years of release. That percentage raises to 79% within 5 years of release, and again to 83% within 9 years of release. The stats on the racial disparities surrounding our State's justice system are equally jarring. Black people make up only 3.9% of Washington State's population, but 17.9% of those incarcerated in Washington. Compare that with 14.2% and 16.3% for Hispanic people, and 63.7% and 55.5% for White people.

The development of criminal justice institutions has historically been motivated by the sole purpose of deterring criminal activity. Slogans like "harsh time for harsh crime", and political platforms such as "tough on crime", are perfect examples of the capitalization of this "teach them a lesson" mentality. This ideology on incarceration, coined "**retributive**", is par for the course in the American criminal justice system. The logic goes, the more miserable that people are in prison, the less likely they are to re-offend and risk coming back. While this logic might appeal to some at first blush, the statistics on criminal justice in America are far from supportive of it, and the environment created by such a zero-sum mentality not only inherently encourages and incentivizes treatment that dehumanizes incarcerated individuals, but also creates unhealthy environments for those who work

inside of these institutions, raising the risk of stress related illnesses.

More recently, the concept of "**rehabilitative**" incarceration has been a topic of significant interest on America's debate stage. Rehabilitative incarceration focuses on providing support aimed at helping individuals learn to correct their own anti-social behaviors, *and* become productive members of the communities to which they belong. This has been PROVEN to be a more successful model of criminal justice. In the 1990's, prior to laws that completely overhauled its criminal justice system, the country of Norway was facing criminal justice challenges very similar to those now prevalent in the United States. At nearly 70%, Norway's rate for re-offense within 2 years was comparable to that of America's. Since the rehabilitative overhaul of the 1990s, Norway's recidivism rate now sits near 20% and is often touted as THE lowest recidivism rate of any country in the modern world. How did such a drastic turnaround take place? And is such a result even possible in the U.S.? The key to Norway's success doesn't lie in changing only the processes and procedures used to "deal with" individuals in the system; It lies in core tenets that are designed to ensure that the humanity and wellbeing of all involved is the first priority.

Not only did Norway reform its sentencing laws and the ways it held people accountable for their behavior, but it entirely reshaped the way that it viewed and treated the individuals that were to be held to account. Premised on the realization that a vast majority of incarcerated individuals will be released eventually, focus began to shift towards helping those people become better members of the communities they will eventually be released to. This help is provided by way of an institutional focus

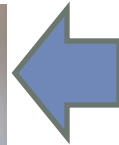
on three concepts, **Normalcy**, **Progression**, and **Dynamic Security**.

The concept of **normalcy** prescribes that life on the inside resemble life on the outside as closely as possible. This concept is based on the common-sense understanding that when people become acclimated to anti-social environments, they adopt anti-social behaviors. In this way, normalcy is an essential element of the concept of **progression**, which stands for the proposition that the purpose of an individual's experience in prison is to get prepared for their eventual release. This means that prisons are merely utilized to provide a safe and secure environment for individuals to build the skills necessary for a successful reintegration to the community, not to further punish or degrade the individuals temporarily housed in them. The third and final concept, **dynamic security**, is equally fundamental to a rehabilitative prison environment. It is unique in that it focuses on the role of prison workers. Not only are correctional officers trained to use force only when absolutely necessary, but part of their training involves studying things like ethics, human rights, and the science of behavior change. In

addition, they are also encouraged to build positive relationships with incarcerated people.

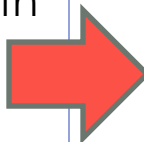
As stated earlier, these concepts symbolize a fundamental transformation in the way that criminal justice has been thought about and pursued in Norway. Implementation of them is reframing the conversation by focusing on how people are treated by criminal justice institutions, and how the treatment of those people affects their communities. This attitude shift has become so ingrained in the identity of Norway as a whole, that it is a common refrain among its citizens that people go to court to be punished; they go to prison to become better neighbors.

There are still holdouts to the theory of rehabilitative incarceration. Norway is, after all, a different country with a much different social history than that of the United States. While it still remains to be seen whether such a strategy would work in the U.S., the climate on American criminal justice continues to change. If such a change is intended to bring different results, then it only makes sense to try something different than what has traditionally been done, and has repeatedly failed.



An inmate's
bedroom at Halden
prison, in Norway.

Halden prison house,
for weekend visits with
family. Similar to a
WADOC EFV trailer.





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