

# CRP California Reentry Program



## Letter from the director

2015 has been an exciting year for us! We have recruited many, many new and energetic volunteers and have expanded the program in a collaboration with the wonderful organization Alliance for Change (<http://www.alliance4change.org/>). They provide life skills inside San Quentin, and support and assistance on the outside. We are providing one-on-one pre-release advising to their clients on Friday afternoons, our fourth session of advising that we offer each week.

Studies show that reentry advising alone is not sufficiently effective to ensure success of our clients on the outside, so we are always looking for ways to partner with other agencies and programs to collaboratively provide a full range of services.

*Continued on page 3*

## Why I volunteer

I started volunteering at San Quentin because I wanted to do something to help an underserved population and to learn about a system I knew almost nothing about. I really hadn't given much thought to prisons or inmates and had no idea what to expect. I confess to being intimidated as we went through security and into the yard where the prisoners hang out, play ball, converse. I imagined the worst: scary guys who had done bad things.

It took a few weeks and talking to several clients for that fear and ignorance to dissipate. Yes, guys had done some reprehensible things, some irrevocable, some less severe. Gradually, I learned individual stories about how they got there (some in their teens) and why they are still there decades later. The more I spoke with men, ignorance gave way to understanding and empathy. Nearly all come from backgrounds I scarcely recognize - poverty, gangs, and violence. The clients I have talked with deeply regret their actions and accept that they are in prison for a reason. Prior to volunteering at San Quentin, I had no strong opinions about our criminal justice system. I assumed our system to be fair, impartial, and that punishment was proportional to the crime. Also, I had no idea that when released from prison often after decades of incarceration, inmates get \$200 and are paroled back to their counties. Their freedoms are limited

*"This has been one of the most humanizing experience of my life."*

*- Matt, Volunteer*

*Continued on page 2*

Why I Volunteer *continued from page 1*

and they check in with a parole or probation officer but they are on their own to find housing, work and a life. The state does very little to ensure survival, much less success.

I see people who made mistakes, paid their dues and are about to be released into a society with almost no support. It is a recipe for failure. Inside, they have no direct access to information to plan what they will do after prison. Imagine trying to function, much less thrive, in a society you haven't participated in for 20 or 30 years: they face a herculean challenge just to have a very basic life. The volunteers at the California Reentry Program help enhance the likelihood that inmates will succeed when they are released. That is the rational reason I volunteer, but honestly the selfish reason is that this has been one of the most humanizing experience of my life. ♦

## One Client's Story

The story of Kamal is a familiar one; it is repeated often in our work with many clients at San Quentin. But while it is familiar, it is also inspirational and helps motivate those of us who do the work that we do to support men in their journey toward creating a future for themselves as they move forward and to encourage their self-discovery and hard work and help them plan for a future that may or may not come.

For Kamal, life got exciting at the age of 14. Before that he experienced rejection by others and a lack of sense of a "home" to which he belonged. Finally at that age, he found acceptance and inclusion in a gang. For the first time, he was with a group that functioned as a family - they were the same age, they liked the same things: selling drugs, drinking, and smoking weed became activities that were shared and supported by his peers. As time progressed, he sought to become a leader among his group and began to take more risks. And then he became more violent, took someone's life and went to prison. That was 22 years ago. He has been in many California prisons while serving his sentence and has steadily worked his way to San Quentin, a medium security prison.

He started at Pelican Bay as an illiterate and angry young man and negative about life. He continued to hold the same belief system that led him to prison. Then something happened five years later at another prison that changed his life: he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It was there that he realized that life was precious to him and he needed to begin to turn his life around. He began educational courses and joined self-help groups.

Criminal Gangs Anonymous with David Lewis made him realize why he joined a gang



Photo courtesy Ryan Smith

**One Client's Story**, *continued from page 2*

and to better understand gang and criminal behavior. Through several prisons he continued his education and self-help groups to become a better, more educated person.

He came to San Quentin in 2009 and continued his path toward self-improvement. Beginning 22 years ago as a functionally illiterate person he is now enrolled in college classes in San Quentin and is working regularly with California Reentry to develop plans for his parole application and his life after prison.

One of our experienced and dedicated volunteers, Kevin Lundquist, has been supporting him with his plans. Kevin meets with Kamal weekly. This has been a great help and relief to both to Kamal and his family. Kamal credits Kevin with helping him keep on course. He says, "I don't know what I would do without this Reentry to help me". Kamal and his family couldn't find transitional housing but Kevin found three options for him. Kamal went to the Parole Board well prepared and the Board was impressed and encouraged him to continue with his program. He will return to the Board in April.

Kamal wants to run his own business when he gets out. He has written a detailed business plan outlining his proposal to employ people to refurbish and sell homes. While in prison he has become certified in construction work. He has a 5 year old grandson that he wants to be able to bring into the business someday and to leave the business in his hands as a legacy.

Kamal is content with his knowledge and acceptance of himself and doesn't expect society to either accept or forgive him. He would like to be paroled but if he needs to serve the remainder of his sentence, he is at peace with that. He acknowledges that what he did was unacceptable and perhaps unforgivable and he will accept whatever happens. He will continue to work toward his self-betterment and goals, regardless of his incarceration status. And he will continue his work with the California Reentry Program. ♦

*"I don't know what I would do without this Reentry to help me".*

**- Kamal**

*Letter from the director, continued from page 1*

We cross-refer clients and volunteers to other programs, co-host events, and are now jointly fundraising.



Photo courtesy Art Chang

Collaboration strengthens us all and we are proud to ally ourselves with our partners who help all the wonderful organizations who are working tirelessly at San Quentin and beyond to support healthier, happier, safer, and more just communities.

I hope you will join us in our fight through donations, advocacy, and volunteering!

Allyson West, Executive Director

## Ways to Help

- Volunteer: Volunteers are a crucial part of CRP's work. We especially need Spanish speakers. The more volunteers we have, the more people we can help reenter society. We ask that volunteers commit a year and about 6-8 hours per week to the program. Here are the days and times:
  - ◆ Tuesday and Thursday evenings 6:00—8:00 pm
  - ◆ Friday afternoons 2:30—5:00 pm
- Donate: As a non-profit, CRP depends on donations to run. Money goes towards recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers, and gathering resources and materials that assist prisoners in reentry.
- Donate
  - ◆ Online at [ca-reentry.org/donate](http://ca-reentry.org/donate), or
  - ◆ By mail to P.O. Box 483, San Quentin, CA 94964



Photo courtesy Ryan Smith

Support for the California Reentry Program comes from individual donations and foundations

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