



# CRP California Reentry Program

## Letter from the Director

Everyone interested in the California prison system and criminal justice issues is talking about the most recent legislation signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown last month: AB109 or the “realignment.” The bill is designed to shift “nonserious, nonviolent and non-sexual” felons into county facilities, effective July 1, 2011.

Although it is written into the bill that these changes will not take effect until funding is in place from the state to local governments to cover the cost, counties are already starting to mobilize, planning for supervision of thousands of what normally would be parolees, and expecting jail populations to grow considerably. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation director Matt Cate was cited in the LA Times as reporting that 47,000 parole violators were sent back to prison last year for 90 days or less. Perhaps state officials are beginning to recognize that CDCR incarceration for this period of time is not productive or rehabilitative; perhaps they are simply deferring costs to county governments. Regardless, the state has major changes in store in how it deals with people convicted of felonies.

Here are the pros: many more of convicted felons will be housed in county facilities, where it is hoped they will have greater access to treatment and programs given by local

*Continued on page 4*

## Our Right-hand Men

### Intro

One thing our supporters might not know about our program is that we rely on the help of our incarcerated clients to facilitate advising nights. Every Tuesday and Thursday, they volunteer with us to keep us organized by displaying advising materials, signing clients in, and ensuring that everyone gets to speak to an advisor in a timely and orderly fashion. We could not do it without them!

For nearly a year, Scott and Latif have been our dedicated helpers. Volunteers Chase and Mary Lou sat down with them to find out a bit more about their lives and why they choose to spend time helping CRP out.

### Scott

Scott first heard about CRP about a year ago, after advising hours

were announced one evening. He came in and spoke with volunteer David, but decided it made more sense to wait for advising until closer to his release date. He then asked if the program needed help with the departure of our last featured super star, Wendell, and started volunteering. Now clients come to him with reentry questions, and he knows who to direct them to for certain topics. Scott feels he has become a “solid liaison” for the program since he knows the ins and outs of

*Continued on page 2*



San Quentin.

"I was amazed that a nonprofit with volunteers would come in and do this for prisoners at San Quentin. I was also amazed at the multitude of different ways that we help guys," Scott says.

Scott describes himself as a very busy guy. In addition to helping CRP two nights per week, he works full-time for the Prison Industries Authority as a warehouse clerk. He also volunteers with Project Choice, a program that provides supportive services to young offenders returning to Oakland. Beyond that, he is the facilitator for four substance abuse groups that meet each week.

*"I was amazed that a nonprofit with volunteers would come in and do this for prisoners at San Quentin"*

*-Scott H.*

"After I was sentenced, I didn't realize what had happened until I was sitting in my cell. I asked myself, what will I do in prison for three years? I decided I was going to help as many people as possible."

Asked why some prisoners don't take advantage of programs, Scott replies, "I think a lot of people give up on themselves. And the percentage of men in here that are completely institutionalized is amazing."

On the subject of what is needed for parolees to successfully reenter society, Scott believes the main issue is self-esteem.

"You guys helping them with specific tasks and goals builds their self-esteem. The first 72 hours after release is the most critical time. Guys need a solid plan."

As for what his future holds, Scott already has a definite plan: "When I get out I want to become a certified Drug & Alcohol Counselor and continue to do a lot of the same things I'm already doing in here."

## Latif

Latif heard about the California Reentry Program when it was announced in the dorm. Latif is one of many aspiring entrepreneurs at San Quentin. He first came to advising to get information on real estate and school. He was interested in providing senior housing and wanted information regarding the business as well as business management and grants. In addition, he was interested in information on opening a clothing business, design, a business license, import and export, music production and photography.

Latif works weekly with the California Reentry Program, putting out brochures and flyers of information for the inmates on various topics, signing clients in, and directing them to specific volunteers.

When asked how the California Reentry Program has benefited him, Latif commented, "It is a good opportunity to prepare for the future, and something to look forward to each week."

Many thanks to Scott and Latif for their dedication and hard work!



All photos in this issue courtesy Arthur Chang

## Reese's Thursdays at San Quentin

I first got involved with the CRP almost two years ago. I was unemployed at the time and wanted to give back to the community. I have previously worked with seniors in the community who are in a similar situation; they are unseen, hidden in their single apartments forgotten by friends and family. I enjoy helping people who want to help themselves but don't have the proper tools to do so, and that is what we do in the CRP.

What makes me want to come back every week is the paycheck! Just kidding.

*"The guys are just like you and me, they miss their families, they have heartache and can't show it, they continue to have hope which keeps them going on from day to day"*

It's the ability to help someone who wants to be helped, be as successful as they possibly can be when they are released. Just even the simple thing as having dress outs waiting for them when they get released is an overwhelming thing, when wearing the standard gray sweat suits when leaving the prison and riding the bus is a HUGE stigma. There are plenty of other challenges that are going through the mind, and having people stare at you just adds to the stress of being on the outside.

Also what brings me back is the excitement Allyson and all the volunteers have about just being there. I have known Allyson to come to CRP after having been on a transatlantic flight just hours beforehand. She always says, "These are all my guys!"

I am very proud to say that I have participated in the first "Green Job Fair" at San Quentin. This was a two way street. Employers were able to see where people are coming from, what they are learning, how they are trying to change their lives by going to AA/NA classes, working on their GED or earning University credits, and what skills they already possess. This also gave people a lot of hope that life can be better when released and could work on something positive than just focusing on the mistakes that they had made.

While in H-Unit I feel very comfortable and not afraid. Yes, you are in a prison. Yes, "something" could happen, and that is not the reason why I am there. I really enjoy listening to someone's story where they are coming from and what they are looking to change when they are released. I think of them as a person, not someone who should be punished for the rest of their lives. Being at San Quentin they are paying their debt to society. The CRP is a voluntary program, they come to us, and we don't go to them. They are not forced to see me every Thursday night; they want to come see my colleagues and me. 9 times out of 10 I am not aware of the type of crime that has been committed to bring them to San Quentin. Most men tell me they don't want to go back to where they came from, they want a fresh start. Not only am I able to provide for the guys, I get something back.

When I tell people that I volunteer for the CRP, at first they give me this wild-eyed look and ask why? I explain to them that we have all made mistakes in our lives, and these guys just got caught. The guys are just like you and me, they miss their families, they have heartache and can't show it, they continue to have hope which keeps them going on from day to day.

*Letter from the Director, continued from page 1*

providers. This will better inform these clients about local services smooth the way into society upon their release. The counties will also be pressured into looking into alternatives to conventional state incarceration: reentry courts, drug courts, peer courts, and restorative justice.

The cons: county resources - already strained - will be required to expend even more on local incarceration, supervision, medical and mental health treatment, and judicial (court, legal) costs on this population. Without assistance from local nonprofits and communities, the realignment just shifts the problems our state currently is experiencing to local governments and will see no improvement in our trouble criminal justice system.

-Allyson West, Executive Director



### What your donation buys:

- ◆ \$ 8 cost of shipping and handling a box of parole clothing
- ◆ \$ 30 copies of materials for 5 clients paroling to Alameda Co.
- ◆ \$150 set of 100 evaluation postcards
- ◆ \$500 time and materials for a workshop
- ◆ \$700 six months of training expense for new volunteers

**Thank you for your support!**

Support for the California Reentry Program comes from individual donations and foundations including the San Francisco Foundation, Next Fund, Stanley Langendorf Foundation, and Mitchell Kapor Foundation

California Reentry Program  
P.O. Box 483  
San Quentin, CA 94964