



# CRP California Reentry Program

## Letter from the Director

### When our volunteers are victims of crime

When I wrote our mission statement while working on our incorporation and nonprofit status, I thought "This is easy. All we do is help California prisoners with resources in their areas of release."

But then I thought again.

As I continue to observe our wonderful volunteers work with our clients, I see that a huge part of what we do is provide each with interactions that would normally not be available to the other. Our volunteers learn so much from the clients about the criminal justice system, foster care system, and poverty. In turn, the clients learn about communities connecting and helping, regardless of background, interests, education, or criminal history.

Recently one of our volunteers' wallets was stolen. This prevented her from coming to the prison as her driver's license was in her wallet and she needed that picture ID for clearance at the gate. When a volunteer is a victim of a crime - be it a theft, assault, vandalism or something else - we talk to the clients about it. Many of our clients are victims of crime; some are so used to it that it almost seems

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## One Man's Dream

By Ivy I.

"The first thing I'm going to do when I get out is cook island food, then sushi and Chinese food and then have an Oreo milkshake," said John with a huge grin on his face. John has been attending reentry advising since February 14th and refers his friends, too. He thinks the volunteers who come to the prison are good people with good hearts, and those are the types of people he will surround himself with when he leaves San Quentin in a few months.

This is John's third time being entangled in the criminal justice system. The first two cases he was able to beat on his own. He was always a straight A student who admits he misused his intelligence to make some bad choices. When he gets out, he's got a plan. He's used the California Reentry Program to research educational financial aid and law school. He's confident in his ability to excel in law school. However, his biggest concern was whether he'd be able to write the California Bar Exam. One of the volunteers in the CRP program directed me toward "Factors Regarding Moral Character Determination," which lists guidelines the Bar committee uses to evaluate if a former convict has been rehabilitated enough to be accepted into the Bar. This gave John

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Photo courtesy Ryan C. Smith

## Volunteer Profiles!

*Note: We recently sat down with two of our volunteers, Donna and Zoni, to hear about their experiences with CRP and learn of the contributions they are making to the program and clients they serve.*

**Donna**, like most of CRP's volunteers, has a passion for education. She volunteered in prisons in Florida and Kentucky before joining CRP in 2009 and she's currently working on a doctorate in educational leadership.

To be successful as a volunteer, she says one needs an open mind and a willingness to help. It's also important to gauge each inmate's mood and evaluate his needs, she said.

"Some of the guys I've worked with have been very fearful about being paroled. One gentleman ... had been in San Quentin for so long and was afraid of losing the structure of the prison.

"With people who are fearful, I try to give them as many resources as possible. I could work with a guy for three to six months. It all depends on their needs," she said.

There's no single solution for all her clients. Each one needs her individual attention. Each inmate completes a form that covers their needs: housing, substance abuse treatment, education, even a resume.

"Then, when they get become more comfortable, they request other things," she said. "During the conversation, you have an idea about what else they might need.



Photo courtesy Ryan C. Smith

"I had a guy who told me his mother just passed away. He was concerned about her property and needed information about a power of attorney, something we had never talked about. So, I provided him with that information as well, which was a very rewarding experience for me. When a client opens up, particularly about life-changing events, you know you have gained their trust."

Donna's dissertation is about using volunteers in the correctional system, so her experience at San Quentin is invaluable. But it's also re-

warding personally.

"I feel that I am making a huge contribution to the inmates who are up for parole because I'm providing them services and resources and tools that will help them be a productive citizen or individual in their community," she said.

**Zoni** has been volunteering at San Quentin for two years with both the Prison University Project and CRP. While at UC Berkeley, she studied legal history, which introduced her to the academic side of the criminal justice system, but she wanted the hands-on experience of working in a prison.

*"The result is an exciting plan to mentor at-risk youth and use his criminal background to give back to the community."*

*- - Zoni*

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some hope. He's sharp, very articulate and plans to use his skills to provide a strong criminal defense for those who don't have access to one. He's also very passionate about prison sentencing reform.

When he returns to his hometown he wants to work in youth outreach and gang prevention with Operation Peacekeepers. He feels if someone like himself had been there for him when he was a kid, things may have turned out differently. He loves working with kids and wants to work to create more positive outcomes for the ones being raised in his community. He wants to be there for the kids who have problems they can't face alone, and who can't turn to their parents. He says this was what he needed when he was younger.

John spends his time learning to play guitar, studying all the other resources he's gotten through CRP like getting federally bonded, interviewing tips and resume building. He loves anime and Twilight and proudly admits he's Team Jacob. Going home makes him both happy and nervous, but he's got a plan; one he's creating with CRP's assistance. Next, we'll be exploring Bay Area law school options including Humphreys College of Law in Stockton, Golden Gate University and even UC Berkeley and Stanford.

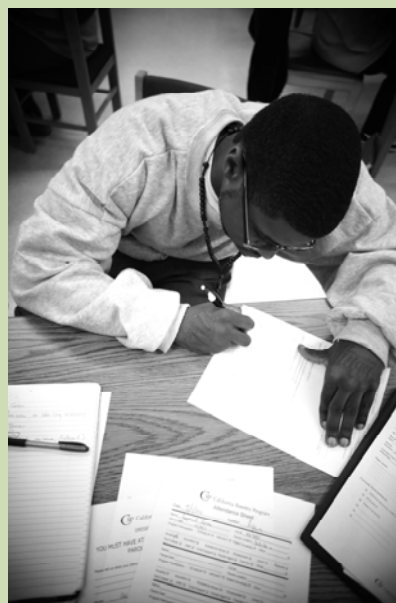


Photo courtesy Ryan Smith

*Volunteer Profiles, continued*

In her work with clients, Zoni focuses on probing into his background, assessing the situation and developing a plan.

"Some clients have a plan, while others do not. It is very individualized support. One client has been in prison for a very long time and is nervous about getting out. But, together, we came up with a structured plan, so he will not be at loose ends when released."

"Another client was initially just looking for general employment information. In helping to write his resume, I discovered volunteer experience. It later came out he wants to get back into volunteering. The result is an exciting plan to mentor at-risk youth and use his criminal background to give back to the community. He will volunteer to establish himself in this new role, and if successful he will have built skills that could lead to a full-time profession"

*"I'm providing them services and resources and tools that will help them be a productive citizen or individual in their community"*

*-- Donna*

Most clients have had institutional and personal failures that have led them to prison. Giving clients forward-looking plans and having someone in their court supporting and advocating for them is a huge contribution.

In return, Zoni has benefited by gaining an increased understanding of, and sensitivity to, the effect criminal justice policies have on individual cases and situations. In October, Zoni takes her experience at San Quentin to the next level when she will move to New York where she'll be working with lawyers who advocate for public defense clients.

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normal. When we talk about it with the clients we not only share a little of ourselves, they get further insight into the ripple effect that a small crime like a stolen wallet has, such as a volunteer not gaining access to working with her clients. They express such sympathy for the volunteer, and frustration that it had an impact on her emotionally, financially and in terms of how it affected others, including the prisoners themselves. It gives everyone a starting point to discuss the impact of crime on society as a whole, and learn even more from each other.

Every day we're at San Quentin, everyone learns something new.

## **You Make Our Work Possible**

Through the generous donations of individuals and foundations, the California Reentry Program provides resources for prisoners paroling throughout California. We also provide parole clothing for those who cannot pay out of their gate money for state-issued parole clothes. Donations of money and clothing are needed to support our work. We receive no state or federal funding.

Our mission is to assist California prisoners in successfully reentering society. This includes developing parole plans; providing prisoners assistance with developing social skills and obtaining services in their local communities; promoting public support for such programs; and providing a model for reentry programs that can be replicated in California and elsewhere.

- ◆ Donate online at [ca-reentry.org/donate](http://ca-reentry.org/donate), or
- ◆ Donate by mail to P.O. Box 483, San Quentin, CA 94964

Support for the California Reentry Program now comes solely from individual donations. Please help as you can. Front page photo courtesy of Ryan C. Smith.

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