

From Cell Block to City Block - Strategies for a Successful Re-Entry
November 18, 2008, St. Paul's Cathedral, Boston, MA
transcripts

Part 2

KAREN SPENCE: OK. He's still working on the disk but we're going to ask Eugene to get up and speak from Straight Ahead Ministries

EUGENE SCHNEEBERG: Good evening. I guarantee to be short. Appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today from the vantage point of a former supervisor of a DYS detention facility, a former program director of the National Ready for Work Initiative funded by the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice, a 3 year 32 million dollar national demonstration project, currently the director of operations for Straight Ahead Ministries in Lynn overseeing reentry initiatives currently funded through the Shannon Grant Initiative and the Byrne Grant through the Executive Office of Public Safety. For five years, we've worked to provide comprehensive supportive services to incarcerated juveniles in the greater Boston area and I guess I'll be speaking from the perspective of agencies focusing on juvenile reentry although over the past year, we have shifted our program to incorporate 17-year-olds who are incarcerated in adult facilities. For the past year, we've launched a pilot with Essex County Correctional Facility working with 17 to 24-year-olds. We worked with about 50 guys, four of whom incarcerated for murder at the age of 17 or 18. The following 10 recommendations are based on lessons learned from several research projects conducted with over 400 formerly incarcerated youth and young adults in Massachusetts. They are particularly geared towards community-based and faith-based agencies looking to do work inside facilities.

Number one, agencies providing reentry support to prisoners should be based in communities where inmates are returning to upon serving, finishing their sentence, and should have established credibility within those communities.

Two, faith-based and community-based agencies that possess the ability to develop relationships with inmates are essential in doing this type of work. Without relationships built on mutual respect and trust, inmates oftentimes will not engage or benefit during their incarceration or during their critical reentry period.

Three, a specific focus should be placed on inmates and attention given to inmates between the ages of 17 to 24. It's a critical age in their development and emphasis on attaining their GED and pursuing further education or career training. About 50% of the guys that we work with are currently pursuing their GED that weren't before.

Four, faith and community-based agencies should be trained and equipped to work with gang-involved youth and the unique challenges that they face.

In closing, in order to run a successful reentry initiative, there has to be strong buy-in from the prison itself. I have to give kudos to Essex County because they do really support the work

that we do and they put the guys that are on our initiative first on the list for all the programs offered at the prison. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Next, I want to bring up Joe Yandle.

JOE YANDLE: I'll make my comments brief. Fortunately those who had come to the podium before me have spoken very eloquently about some of the things that I was going to talk about.

My name is Joe Yandle. I work for a group called EPOCA, Ex-prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement based out of Worcester and we deal primarily with people that are released from prison trying to find work and trying to find housing and are limited because of the CORIs.

In 1972, I was fortunate enough to be part of a system that was primarily focused on rehabilitation and not incarceration, although incarceration was certainly a part of it. At that time, during the 70s and the 80s, the Massachusetts Correction Department had a vast majority of programs for education, job training, counseling, computer services and virtually all of those programs have been stopped since 1987.

When then governor Michael Dukakis ran for president, a lot of things came into play that created a conflict with the Department of Corrections. A whole group of people were brought back behind the walls from minimum security, some of whom have been out there for six and seven years with no disciplinary problems. They lost their furloughs. They lost their minimum security benefits and they lost opportunities for programs. In 1992, the same thing happened with second degree Lifers. They also lost their opportunities from minimum security.

These were all programs that were designed to help people go through the system from maximum to medium to minimum and then prerelease. Those opportunities have been vastly eliminated for the vast majority of the inmates in the Department of Corrections. Programs are virtually nonexistent. The only program that they have right now, the CRA program, religious programs, ESL, the GED program, and some limited life skill programs. As I said, I was fortunate enough to be in a system that I was able to get a Bachelor's degree and work on a Master's degree. I worked with Lyn in Walpole in the 70s. I was fortunate enough to be taught by Paule Verdet and working on my Bachelor's and my Master's degree. It's important that these programs are brought back into the institutions.

I'm hoping Commissioner that you'll step back and take a look at what's been lost in the Department of Corrections by virtue of all these programs being cut and then take a step forward in try and reintroduce those programs back into the system. We applaud you for taking a stance and publicly supporting the mandatory sentencing bills. We hope also that you will promote and publicly support the new CORI reform bill that we input before the legislature on January 14th and we also hope that some discussion in the Department of Corrections will be taken to bring back statutory good time to help alleviate the overcrowding in the prison system and get people out of prison so that you don't have to double bunk in a maximum security prison at Souza Baranowski. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: OK, next I'm bringing up Kazi Toure who is going to read for Arnie King and several folks at Bay State.

KAZI TOURE: First I want to thank the people who organized this event and the Commissioner for coming here and hearing what people have to say. I'm going to read these questions from people at Bay State. A lot of prisoners got together and put these questions together but also I would like to say, you know, to continue the thought of what Bobby put out because a lot of people raised their hands to say that even if we could push that button that there would be no recidivism that the DOC wouldn't do it. So people understand that it's not in their interest to make anything work for people. It's not in their interests. It's about job security. They need the prisoners coming back.

So if we're going to make any of these programs and anything work, those people will have to be removed and the people have to come whose interest it is to have safer communities. Those people have to go because they know and they've known for a long time you can go on any web pages and you could see on the DOC web page when they had the furlough program, 129,000 people got furloughed, with only 5% negative, 99.6% positive and they cut it. They cut all the programs because they don't want to lose their prisoners.

I don't know how this is going to work because these questions like require some answers, you know, so at this time, do we get the answers from them?

KAREN SPENCE: Well no. Just read them for them to contemplate and we'll go from there. Maybe you can answer them when you're done.

KAZI TOURE: Also, I like to say one other thing about that. My brother is in Bay State and he's been in prison for 36 years since he was 18 years old. He's been in the parole board four times and the last two times they voted for him to be released. The last time the unanimous decision and it's been sitting on the governor's desk since December 18th.

So, reentry initiatives must begin early. This is echoing what some other people said from the time people come into prison and leave. They have to begin. In recent years, program volunteers have been prevented from attending and submitting documents to commutation and parole hearings. Such contributions are for a neutral perspective about the rehabilitative process. Would you change this policy to allow program volunteers to participate in these public hearings?

Two, Boston University has offered courses to Massachusetts's prisoners for over 30 years. Approximately 25 prisoners currently possess graduate degrees and many others have been awarded Bachelor's degrees in Liberal Studies. The majority of the new prisoners are high school dropouts. BU graduates could be used in a capacity as teachers and provide valuable services in this area. What do you think of this proposal?

What is the connection between the reentry initiatives and doubling up in Shirley Max, because they're doubling up in Shirley Max. The focus should be on prerelease centers and halfway houses. Too many people are being released from walled institutions and they're often unsuccessful while adjusting to the environment.

There is an aging population within the DOC which consists of men and women growing older during the incarceration period. How will the commissioner address these special needs of

safety, health, and stabilize relationships with the family and communities? Is it possible to create a facility for older prisoners who are not a management problem? Bay State was originally designed in 1991 for this population. Such an environment would be conducive to a meaningful classification and provide any review and authority with a significant evaluative source.

Are you receptive towards legislation to make all lifers eligible for parole and eliminate mandatory sentencing 25 years to parole eligibility for first degree lifers?

Why can't the restrictions be lifted which prohibits persons convicted of taking a life or causing a death having access to minimum security institutions?

Is the classification point system under review for possible change?

There are an extremely high percentage of prisoners in high security placement also known as overclassified than appropriate. What adjustments should be made?

Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: All right. Thank you. Next, I want to bring up Mallory of Reflect and Strengthen.

MALLORY HONORA: Thank you and good evening. My name is Mallory Honora and I'm a member of Reflect and Strengthen. Reflect and Strengthen is a collective of young working class women from the urban neighborhoods of Boston who take a holistic approach to organizing in order to create personal and social transformation. Our programming focuses are political education, healing from trauma, creative expression, community building, and campaign work to end racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Our constituency is disproportionately impacted by incarceration and violence. It is impossible to divide our community into victims and offenders. Families and blocks have endured both sides of harm. Homes and neighborhoods are ripped apart by jail as much as crime. Therefore, reentry needs to be a collective process with the constant engagement of community organizations whose work is rooted in accountability and in support.

In addition to substance abuse treatment and job training, inmates must have the opportunity to rebuild relationships with community members who can welcome them back and hold them accountable for changing their behavior. People in prison must have the opportunity to hear from the community about the impact of the harm they caused so that we can live together without further harm and the community must be able to hear about the harm that prisoners have experienced so they can be supported when they come out. Doing so means that somebody is able to take full responsibility for their actions. Then they must have the opportunity to intentionally think about changing their actions with the people they will be living amongst plan for that change, commit to that change and have tangible support for implementing changes in their life and in their community.

I want to testify in support of restorative justice practices like healing circles, victim-offender dialogues, and programming designed and delivered by community organizations. We, the

community, are ultimately responsible for the success of a person reentering and we are deeply affected when a person is unstable, unhealthy, and without opportunity. Therefore, we should have a stake in the process before a person ever gets out of an institution.

Community organizations who can demonstrate an expertise in reentry and in accountability work should be formally included in the plan of the commissioner. Since these agencies, mine included, are often a part of providing services for an individual once they have left prison, it is only logical we need to play a role on the inside as well.

Community organizations need to be given the resources and the institutional access to guide inmates through transition with support and services.

Reentry reform is impossible without CORI reform and access to employment, education, and housing. We cannot continue to punish people who have already served their time with the record that prevents them from holding a job or building their future. Just because of our organization's expertise in gender specific programming, I would also like to advocate that gender-specific programs be available and be developmentally appropriate as well as culturally relevant. We need to focus on the quality of programs for juveniles and their connection to the community so that DYS does not become an automatic gateway to the adult system.

In order to stop thinking of jail as a place for services and treatment, our agencies like Reflect and Strengthen and the others testifying tonight, must be able to do our work within the system and maintain connections with young people and adults when they are released. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: OK. Next, I'm going to skip ahead because we have a person who needs to leave. Hakim Cunningham is going to speak.

HAKIM CUNNINGHAM: Good evening Commissioner. I'm just going to speak for all the brothers behind the wall, lifers, people that's classified for nonviolent crimes and also violent crimes being overclassified, overcrowded, and housed in conditions where the \$48,000 a year just to house them is not necessarily going to them. It's going to security. It's going to pockets of others. It's not going to the prisoners.

My inmate number is W83464. I spent time behind the wall in Concord. I spent time behind the wall in Shirley, in different areas and you can't make changes for the prisoners, honestly, in a boardroom. You have to come into the prisons and see where that money is going, see what the programs are being implemented and see what the situations are in these prisons. You cannot change prisoners' live from sitting from a boardroom. You can't change it from somewhere at a high rise in a skyscraper.

When you stroke those pens, make sure you take the time out to come down and see the effect of those pens in those walls. That's going to be the difference. That's going to be the difference.

It's easy for a lot of people to say, "Hey, this is not my problem. I'm not affected by it." But look to your left, look to your right; everyone is affected by this. Be in indirectly or directly, crime affects all families and it's about economics. Let's be serious here people. Everyone here tonight, it's about Economics. It's about how to house a prisoner for the least amount of money and that's what's going on. You're shuffling people around like cattle and herds in situations and

you're financing certain things but the money is not going to where it needs to be going to. Those programs, the education, all of the good time, all of those things that's necessary, things that are supposed to be mechanisms to create change. Dollars are going in but dollars are not being utilized for what's the purpose.

I just want to say about the solitary confinement issues, these isolation issues, and these suicides in prison. People have posttraumatic stress disorders. They are more stressed when they come out from the trauma going in. People go in on a cell shocked and also come out. I went in. I never smoked cigarettes. I came home from prison, I smoke a pack and a half every three days. Why? Because of the shock of going in and dealing with the reality what I seen behind the wall.

Believe me, a lot of times people don't really talk about what's happening behind those walls because they're not behind them. I was behind them. There's things going on. People need to get together, get a committee go inside these places and see where this funding is going, because if you don't, you're only going to have a repeat. What you need to start learning how to do is, OK, stop being comfortable. Get out of your comfort zones, get out your house, going down and finding out what your pen and that stroke on that piece of paper is really affecting and I say it in peace.

KAREN SPENCE: OK. Next, I'm going to bring up Kirsten from Amherst College. Oh I'm sorry.

COMMISSIONER HAROLD CLARK: Can I say something?

KAREN SPENCE: Yes, please.

COMMISSIONER HAROLD CLARKE: Good evening. I also want to thank you all for coming. I think it's very important that you're here to participate in this conversation. You know, I could spend a lot of time here defending the department but I'm not going to do so. I'm not going to do so because regardless of what I say, it's not going to make an impact on some individuals who have a particular bent. But I disagree with the fact that there is no reentry happening within the department. We can talk a lot about what's going on by way of reentry in the department right now but you may not be aware of that.

I disagree with the fact that resources are not being spent on the prison system to do the things that needs to be done because today, Massachusetts is one of the most expensive prison systems in the country. Yes, one of the most expensive prison systems in the country. A lot of taxpayers' dollars are going towards addressing the issues in the department.

Are there issues? Yes. Yes, there are issues. Are there things that we need to work on and improve? Yes, and we want to do so? Yes.

I disagree that the system will choose not to push that button if they could push that button and cause folks to be rehabilitated, because if you study Sociology, you will learn that if crime were to cease to exist the way it is today, society will redefine crime and we're always going to have crime and criminals. It's something that they teach you because in studies in societies across the world, they have seen that.

We want to make a difference. We want to make a change that's why we're here today. That's why we're here today. I've got some folks who are dedicated individuals that I have seen struggle to do the right thing. I just want to make these comments now because I think it's insulting to these people that I see. Ronnie (Veronica) Madden was there early yesterday morning and she and I left late yesterday evening. We started this morning at 6:45 and here we are tonight without having supper yet.

Why are we doing that? Why are we here? It's for a reason it's because we want to make a difference. We want to make a difference that's why we're here. I have a vision of reentry. I've implemented it in other places and I've gotten the results, good results. So we're putting together a foundation, a groundwork, a framework to do those very things but I cannot sit and pretend as though what you're saying is the gospel because it simply is not in many instances.

There's a lot that has been said that I agree with. I truly agree with it in terms of family unification, in terms of attitudes that some folks may have within the department and we have been dealing with those every step of the way, terminating individuals who are abusive, disciplining the folks that need to be disciplined, trying to create a different culture. Those things are occurring today as we speak.

But I would offer to you that as opposed to coming into the prisons, which I'm not saying you can't do and we are allowing folks in. People are coming in now and working with us.

But I'll offer to you that before we focus our attention so much in the prison system, we need to focus our attention on the institutions in the community that are failing individuals well before they come to the prison system.

What are we doing about the fact that in Massachusetts, 50% of the kids entering high school are dropping out before the 12th grade? What are we doing about the fact that even those going to college, about a similar percentage are dropping out before graduation? What are we doing about that fact that a large number of individuals coming through the system are suffering from mental illness?

Believe me folks. We have work to do in prison. We want to hear your voices. We want to work on those issues and that's why this afternoon, Deputy Commissioner Bender and I spent time at Norfolk sitting, speaking to inmates because what they are saying is important as well and we respect and recognize that.

But I offer to you not to use a large brush to paint this administration. Because I didn't come here *because*... I chose to come here because there is work to be done and I have met people who are committed that want to get that job done.

So, fairness should prevail. My staff is not going to stand up as you yell and shout but somebody has to do it for there and I'm going to do it for them but that very staff, if they don't perform or if they are abusive, I too will take charge and do what needs to be done by it as well because after all, we are here to serve the people. We are here to serve the people. And when we fail, this state of Massachusetts, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be injured by our failure.

Time is precious. There's a job to be done. We will go ahead and do that job. Reentry is key. We lack woefully in terms of resources and so forth to get the job done. But I offer to you that before you talk about a myriad of issues, you also need to focus on how to reach the policy makers because quite frankly friends, you are giving the DOC much more authority than we have. We have no control of what happens in the community. Did you know that? None. But the DOC recognizes that there are voids to be filled in the community and so therefore the DOC has actually ventured into the community to do some things, which were really not authorized to spend resources for.

Parole and probation are the entities that are responsible for community programs. Have you addressed them? They are the ones that have been building programs in reentry in the community as it's structured in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In Washington State, my job was a lot easier because in Washington State, I was responsible for the community as well so I could influence what happened there, while the foundation is different in Massachusetts. So if you want to change the law, let's get to know what the parameters are and the limitations and cause it to be changed.

But I ask you as you comment if you don't have the information, ask a question, we will share it with you. We will work with you. But also, the people who chose to come and sit here, the people who chose to sit here needs respect as well. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Thank you. I just want to let you know, Commissioner, there were about six legislators that promised to be here tonight but didn't show. So I just want to let you know we did take your advice and we wanted to. I think one person is here actually. OK. We're going to bring Kristen up from Amherst College.

KRISTEN BUMILLER: I have a positive example of how collaboration with the community can happen. I'm Kristen Bumiller. I'm a professor of political science at Amherst College and for the last three years, I have been teaching the course inside the Hampshire County House of Corrections. My course has 22 students, half of them are from Amherst College and the other half are residents of the facility.

The program is part of the Inside-Out initiative. It was started at Temple University by Lori Pompa. The program has expanded into a nationwide program. There are 164 professors who have been trained. They teach in over 35 states and they have enrolled more than 5000 students. All instructors received comprehensive training on curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, setting parameters, developing strong relationships with staff and correctional facilities.

My course has been enormously rewarding and successful for everyone involved. Amherst students have described the courses one of the most important educational experiences at the college. The inside students gained confidence in their abilities to learn and they take full advantage of the situation just like my Amherst students. The education staff and Hampshire County has welcomed us and they find that having the course in their facility has benefited their other educational endeavors. The incarcerated students received credit from Amherst College and many successful graduates report that the Inside-Out experience was critical to their decision to enroll in community college after their release.

At the celebration of our new Center for Community Engagement in Amherst College, Governor Deval Patrick said the Inside-Out Program, “Brings a vital service to people who are incarcerated.” He said it’s an example of thinking in the long-term interest of preparing people “for reentering civic and productive life and preparing them through educational and interaction with people who are on the outside.” It is vital and it’s not as broad-based as we would like it but it’s one example.

Just to be brief, just to say that there’s over a dozen professors of higher education in the state of Massachusetts who are ready to teach Inside Out courses in state prisons. Throughout the country, state Departments of Corrections are opening their doors to Inside-Out courses including the states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia, Delaware, Arkansas, Indiana, Oregon, and the Federal prison in Leavenworth.

These programs have a well-established track record and have led to valuable collaborations between state systems and institutions of higher education. State commissioners have endorsed Inside Out and documented the benefits of hosting this unique educational program inside state facilities.

These opportunities could also become available in Massachusetts once the DOC hopefully is willing to work with professors like myself who are committed to teaching on the inside.

Thank you for letting me testify to the transformative effects of these courses for incarcerated individuals who need a chance to develop their potential as students and to develop their potential as citizens in their community.

KAREN SPENCE: Thank you. I was just told that Cynthia Creem, Pat Jehlen, and Sonia Chang-Diaz are here. So thank you for coming. Next, I want to bring up Cara, she’s going to speak for Darrel Jones.

CARA: Good evening. My name is Darrel Jones and in the last 22 years, I have served under six governors, four DOC commissioners, and perhaps a hundred different ideologies and studies on how to best change this system.

Now, nearly some five years after the Commission on Corrections study created by Governor Mitt Romney, the philosophy most often heard as to why many of those changes haven’t happened is nothing changes overnight. But sadly, some things do. On January 15th of this year, my second oldest son was shot and killed on the streets of Boston. He died and moments later, my entire family life was changed forever.

Throughout the city of Boston and other cities, many family’s lives have also been changed overnight from sudden losses of a loved one. With that said, I know there are some very influential and professional people in the room who cannot afford to pay for another study. So I offer you my own brief study based on years of great loss to myself, my family, and others I have encountered.

For me, it’s too late to cast blame. That will have to be someone else’s job for tonight.

When Governor Deval Patrick ran for election, he promised to consider the best ideas no matter what the source and to listen. Tonight, I ask you to listen no matter what you may think of the source. It's dishonest to tell the public that various policies and laws will ensure their safety anymore. Many prison solutions of today will have to follow outside the law enforcement system. Articles quoting Mayor Menino have said it seems to him this new criminal mind has no respect for human life anymore. Police Commissioner Davis and others have said the new criminal has no more code of honor respecting neither the lives of women nor children. But this isn't news to me because many studies missed the heartbeat of a hidden philosophy based on hopelessness and a more hardened criminal philosophy that emerge during the rock breaking era of Governor Weld.

Now that same philosophy and prison experience has seeped into outside youth culture. This thinking can't be addressed from central office nor can a superintendent order shake down and find it. Bottom line, some have just embraced the worst of themselves along with whatever the DOC can throw at them until their release. We need more reality based programming.

Presently, CORI laws maybe a center stage on reentry but the struggle is not just finding employment but for many, helping them find themselves before they leave.

There are issues that are not seen in the 2004 Harshbarger final commissioner report or elsewhere that must be implemented such as:

One, the need for a grieving program dealing with family loss behind bars. Many prisoners like myself have lost family members and children while incarcerated. Some simply shut down, never having dealt with those losses in this environment. We need to address that issue before they take on the shock of that reality when they get home. This must be addressed.

Two, there is no mediation program established in the system. When inmates fight, they are sanctioned with loss of visits and/or other privileges. Some are separated through incarcerations are allowed to sign waivers and simply sent on their way but statistic show and police Commissioner Davis and others have suggested, that a lot of community killings appear to be retaliatory.

The question is how many of those retaliatory killings may stem from unresolved prison conflicts? We need a community supported mediation program in here sooner if not immediately for these young men today.

The practice of just mixing inmates without consideration of those here supporting change is like asking us to walk forward in sideways shoes. As past Commissioner Dennehy found out regarding both inmate and staff alike, there are two prison populations: One group, both staff and inmate, looking for a life change and another just wanting things to be left alone.

Yet, there is no designated prison facility for those who are program, life change, and community invested to be housed together. An inmate striving to educate himself and work on his rehabilitation and reconciliation with his community may find himself housed with another inmate whose only agenda is watching TV and exercising in the gym or main yard. A pilot or test block should be established at various facilities to create a new statistic on how such housing unit can be effective to the goal of both prison life and reentry itself.

These solutions require strengthening more opportunities to develop self responsibility and then finding and supporting those programs that can show a more productive set of statistics for that particular program it may turn out to the public. It's time statistics are gathered on a lot these already online programs within the DOC and compare them to how many returnees to the prison system have actually completed them.

The truth is what's needed here are character corrections. Well it's a unified effort between the department, the DOC and its inmate population must be established or in the end, past culture will continue changing the lives of all our children within the communities in a negative way. Responsibility to these youth inside and outside of the prison from the central office to the cell block is all of our jobs. I remain committed but it's a lonely fight without the support from those up top. Sincerely, Darrel Jones.

KAREN SPENCE: OK. We've kind of run out of time for speakers. So we want to ask the Commissioner to come up and talk about his proposal that he'll be submitting to the governor soon, so.

COMMISSIONER HAROLD CLARKE: Good evening. Again, I want to thank you all for the invitation to be here to participate in this very important conversation.

I heard a lot tonight. I heard a lot that I agree with in terms of suggestions and ideas and things that can be done to forward reentry. A lot of the ideas that were shared tonight. I wish you were flies and walls in your offices to listen to the conversations that we have been having because you'll find that I love what was said here today rather congruent with our thinking and the things that we are talking about. But I share with you that while for many of you, these issues are personal. That it's very, very difficult often, even though we support these things to be able, to do as we desire and that is simply because we don't have the authority. We don't have the resources to do a lot of what we would like to do.

And that's why I encourage you all to not just spend your time talking to DOC because as I have said, we agree with a lot of what we have heard, but to get with your representatives, get with your senators and make sure that they too understand what it is you think ought to be done. They hear your thoughts, they hear your ideas, etc. about improving the system and supporting reentry because we are all for reentry.

I come from a place that was doing reentry before it was fashionable. I come from a place that was doing reentry when it was not even called reentry. That is back in 1974 when I joined the Nebraska department as a young counselor. We were doing reentry. I was a vocational rehabilitation counselor and we were training folks for all the trades you can think of: refrigeration and air-conditioning, welding, home building, all those things we were training folks for. So it became second nature to me in terms of the kind of things that need to be done to help people get on their feet and move on down the road.

I recall as a vocational counselor in the Nebraska DOC. Part of my job was to make appointments for interviews for individuals before they got out and I often went on those appointments with them and landed them jobs and trades that were paying more than I was making as a counselor.

So that's my orientation. I come from a place where serving as director in 1997, we had a rate of recidivism of 18.8%. That's my orientation. That's why I was asked to go to the state of Washington, invited there by the Governor from Nebraska to continue to promote those things that gave us the successes in Nebraska. In Washington, I received the support from legislature and others to do some work that's important work to lay a foundation for reentry.

But as I said earlier it was a lot easier to accomplish in Washington because of the way the system is structured in Washington.

In Massachusetts, we're structured differently, one entity has probation, one entity has parole then Corrections has its boundaries and its limitations. But we are a very easy target in Corrections. We're a very easy target and so we have to be thick skinned and be able to stand up and explain to folks where the authority rest, who can do what, what our limitations are, and to voice our willingness to work with them.

We have been addressing reentry with the governor and he's asked us to put together a plan for him, a cost benefit plan that we will be sharing with him this coming December which in a sense is an argument for reentry, beginning at the very beginning with assessments of the individuals who come to us to determine what their needs are, which will be followed then by putting together a plan for each individual, a plan that will follow them all the way to the point of discharge in the department that will identify all the things that that person needs to be successful and effective once discharged.

We recognize that by just walking around the system, as I tour institutions which I have done. I have been in each facility in less than a year several times. So, for the gentleman who talked about not being able to make policies from the Ivory tower, I don't sit at the ivory tower. I have toured each facility many, many times in the system in less than 12 months and my staff goes out there with me as well because we want to know what's going on. We truly value the concept of voicing that is hearing what you have to say and well as hearing offenders have to say because we recognize that we're nothing more than temporary stewards, a very valuable asset of this state and must use it wisely if we intend to make a difference.

Our reentry plan as mentioned begins at the very beginning with assessments, developing personalized and trying to get the resources and add resources to be able to address the needs of the offenders. Today, we don't have those resources. Today, you can walk across any one of our institutions and see a lot of idleness throughout our institutions. So we need to build capacity to respond to the needs of the offenders. We need to build partnerships in the community because we cannot do it alone in terms of volunteers and others coming in to work with us to provide programming and to respond to the needs of the offenders. Some of that is going on right now but we can do more of it. To the professor who talked about teaching behind bars, we welcome that intervention. We welcome that type of support because we are interested, as you have heard I said changing lives one life at a time because that makes a difference. That's where the difference lies.

Now we are always going to have complaints. We are always going to have someone saying, you know, "My doctor didn't treat me the way I would have like to be treated," or, "My nurse--" or who ever. We'll need to understand that there, first of all, is a grievance system internally to

address those issues and there's also the courts that you can turn to and the courts don't owe us anything **but we are not interested in abusing anyone in my administration.**

Now, there are many attitudes out there and there are many people who work in the department that subscribe to perhaps different theories, different approaches but the message I give every time I get a chance, to the staff and others, is that offenders are not in prison to be punished. They're in prison as punishment and that's my position. That's my philosophy and that's what I tell offenders. That's what I tell staff and others and I truly believe that to be the case.

A couple of months ago, I had an injury to my elbow. I went to my doctor and he said, "Oh, this is what it is." He gave me some pills. I went back home. It kept on swelling. It kept on getting worse. So I went to a specialist and he looked at it and he gave me some pills and sent me home. In the entire time it kept on getting worse and I couldn't even tie my tie, I couldn't even tie my tie to go to work and we went over and over many doctor visits until it got to the point that it began to get better. No one really understood why but it's better now. But it took a lot of time before it got to that point.

Did those doctors intend to abuse me? Or did they deliberately mistreat me? I can't say they were. But I think a similar thing happens in prisons wherein physicians and others do their best. You don't get the results you want and it's easy to point a finger and cast blame. Sometimes, people are indifferent but I'm not certain I would agree that's always the case.

So we have work to be done inside the system. In terms of adjusting attitudes, correcting staff behaviors but as the leadership of the organization, it is our belief that we must labor to create a culture within the agency, a culture that's conducive to change, a culture that is going to ultimately serve the people of the Commonwealth.

We call that culture a healing environment. We believe that within our agencies, each facility should be a healing environment that it's every correctional officer's understanding [of] the impact that his or her behavior can have on offenders. Every counselor, every administrator, it's a large, large task but is one that must be addressed and one that must be attempted to accomplish because if we don't do so, then we can be considered to be complacent and deliberately indifferent.

That's not the administration that I see. There will be disagreement but the doors will be open for us to address those disagreements. There will be avenues to address those issues. Our reentry plan I think is one that if supported legislatively, is going to begin to lay a solid foundation. There's a lot that's going on now by way of education, treatment, training with the mental health services we are providing for many, with the BU educational program, the GEDs, all the things I have heard about before.

But I offer to you that while we have a duty and a job I also encourage you to be asking the hard questions out there of policy makers as to why are those people not been able to be made whole before they come to prison. Who should be addressing those issues? Prison has this part to do once it get to us, but before they get there, who is in charge? Who is responsible?

I could go on for a very long time, explain all the details of our plan but in interest of time, just in a nutshell, assessments, development of a plan based on assessments, expansion of resources to accommodate the need and the demands, inclusion of the public, and referrals as they go out of the system to community partners who can then continue the work that was started within the prison system. That's our vision. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Thank you. I'm going to bring Mel King up now to sort of wrap things up. Does anybody want to ask a question before we wrap things up? It's got to be quick.

Mr. Clarke, there is a question for you.

ALEJANDRO CHAPPARO: My name is Alejandro Chapparo and I just got released two months ago and doing a three-year sentence over there. You came by at one time with Mr. Bender and few other guys. I can tell you truthfully that you do need to watch the administrative the work in the prison system because they like to cover up a lot of things when you go through there. They like to really make you perceive that they're doing their job and I got discharged to a shelter. No D reports, trying to go into school, GED, CRA, I did everything that I could possible to make my life a little bit more better. I do believe that I do got some errors in my life but due to my little bit of education and knowing also Fred Smith for many years and trying to make my life a lot better, I'm succeeding a little bit more but not due to the Department of Corrections because they really are not like my man said, you wouldn't hit the button to end recidivism at all. You need to really keep an eye at the facilities with the staff that work there because they are truly making you seem to believe that they're doing their job when they're not. I thank you Mr. Commissioner.

KAREN SPENCE: It's got to be real brief, real brief.

Man: Commissioner. Commissioner. All right. I listened intently to what you said and if it's true that the changes that you want to make, I really respect that. As a young man, I have done my time in prison. I have come home. I have suffered tremendously while I was behind the wall but it was due to a group of older brothers behind the wall that helped me deal with the issues that I needed to deal with. I faced a lot of adversity with DOC staff. I was set back, taken out of programs because I stood up for a lot of prisoners in bad situations. I was placed on AA [Awaiting Action] many times. AA was used against me in different ways but through all that, I have come home, now I work. My job is to help guys deal with reentry and to make a smooth transition back into society. I'm looking to run for public office next year.

I hope that your goal is to make a change and I hope that you reach out to brothers, to people, young men, older men, who have come home and made a change in their life to go back in and help others make a change because when they look for professors at Princeton and Harvard and these Ivy League schools, they look for individuals who have succeeded in those institutions, who have been through those institutions, attained their degrees and shown to be proficient in whatever field of study needs to be taught.

I believe that I have shown within my community within my family and to those around me that I have gone through the system whatever the adversity is. I'm not going to point any fingers. I think that I have a little bit but I'm not going to continue to point fingers because it is what it is. I made the decision to change. I know what it takes because I have done that and there are

many, many people like myself who have done that and I hope that your administration reaches out to those like myself to come back in to the institutions that your door is open and don't bar me just because of my CORI and my history because I have a genuine love for the brothers behind the wall. I write to some now. I have a genuine love and concern for them coming home and doing what they need to do to make a difference in their families, in their lives, and in their communities so that we can have a better place. It's a public safety issue but more important, it's a personal issue. It's a family issue. It's for men to come home and be the proper person in their family that they need to be to raise themselves and raise these young people coming behind you. Thank you very much.

Man: Hi. I want to say one thing to myself. Well I'm a product—

KAREN SPENCE: Hold on. Let him respond to him.

[Inaudible response]

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I appreciate your comments but I think you need to understand [Inaudible] [interruption] that those decisions are made on a case by case basis. I have hired ex offenders to come in to the systems not here in Massachusetts but in Nebraska. [Talking] and did the job, I know exactly what you're talking about. But, in Massachusetts, by law we are not allowed to hire ex-offenders. It's something that we need to again, as the people and the public, focus on getting that law changed.

Man: I volunteer my time, brother.

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: So there are limitations. There are things in place that causes us again to be successful at one place but not elsewhere. But we can allow you to come back in to serve as a volunteer and a mentor and so forth. Most recently, Chuck Turner and several others contacted me shortly after I got here and said, "Would you allow us in to go in and to talk to the offenders?" And I said to them, "Sure. We think your project is worthwhile." They went in, did some work with the offenders, did some filming which have been used to work with younger potential offenders in the community and that conversation, that dialogue with Chuck Turner and his colleagues and the offenders continues today at Bay State. So we are not opposed to do these things. But you need to understand we are a prison system. So, there is always going to be a need for scrutiny. There also is a need for checks and balances and so forth. But we are hoping to take a look at any reasonable suggestion. [Inaudible]

MEL KING: I've been asked to wrap this up. We are, as part of our agreement to use the church said that we would be out of here by nine p.m. So I know there are people who have additional things and comments that they want to make, you have to do that to the commissioner and the folks are on the way out.

What we've heard are the kinds of things that people believe will make a difference inside the cellblock so that they can be effective citizens on our city blocks. But what else we've heard is that there are policies that have to be changed and we did invite a number of legislators to come and they didn't. Now they're our legislators. They're your legislators. It's easy to come and be on the commissioner's case. He's here. How do we go to the policy makers and get on their case?

So I want to emphasize that. This is just the beginning of our approach to make our streets safe and making the street safe means that folks who have a problem when they come back are able to find a place in our lives and we in their lives, where they can be comfortable and their families are comfortable and we're all comfortable because we know that we have worked together to put in place policies, programs, and practices that make life better for all.

Now, the presidential campaign was about change. When Deval Patrick ran, he was about change.

A lot of people talked about hope. I won't talk about hope. I talk about expectations. What the commissioner said that he had expectations of the policy makers and of community agencies. We said we have expectations of the Department of Correction and the Commissioner.

Expectations, but with those expectations comes our need to work to make them come true and if we don't get on the legislators' case on the specifics, then we don't really have expectations. Expectations means that we're going to work to make this system the way it ought to be.

We heard talk about a need to do something about DSS. We heard people talk about the school to prison pipeline. The commissioner said, what about the systems we live under where young people don't get educated because part of the work we need to do is to make sure that they don't end up in jail.

We know, that there's more work to be done. We're going to put out the information about the legislators, tell you who you ought to be talking to. We get more information from the commissioner about next steps. You who have community organizations need to send the information to the commissioner saying how you will be willing to work with him and the Department of Corrections. We do that, we'll make this evening worthwhile. Thank you.