



November/December 2014
Volume 29, Issue 3

News Review
Excerpt



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Shaking Things Up: New Tools for Reentry

Coming home from prison is no easy feat. Each person will experience a variety of challenges and encounter unique hurdles. Reentry preparation can include obtaining a GED; writing resumes, honing skills and getting ready for work; finding identification, shelter, clothes, food and transportation; preparing to reintegrate with family and friends, and much more. There is no 'guide book' nor are there 'best practices' to ensure success.

Making things even more difficult, reentry resources, workshops and strategies vary greatly among institutions and few reentry resources are available to all inmates, nationwide. Fair Shake is one of these resources.



FCI Ray Brook Reentry Affairs Coordinator Sue Kieffer and Fair Shake Director Sue Kastensen work with FCI Ray Brook inmates to build a reentry curriculum around the Fair Shake's Reentry Packet

Fair Shake is a national reentry tech-based resource center which – like a virtual hardware store – offers free tools, materials and information to support people who want to build bridges of trust, engagement and success. In the web-based resource center (www.fairshake.net), visitors will find a Resource Directory filled with 15,000 entries plus resource guides from around the country; they will be able to learn to use computers, prepare for employment and connect to education. They will have access to the Reentry Packet and the free office-in-the-clouds for Fair Shake members. Visitors will also be able to learn to understand other reentry stakeholders such as employers, family members and the greater community. All this – and much more – is useful for the formerly incarcerated, but what about the hundreds of thousands of people who prepare to go home each year?

To ensure a variety of information is available to inmates in any institution – prison or jail – Fair Shake has created software that behaves almost exactly like their website except for one important detail: the 15,000 links are not connected to the internet. Even with this loss, software users are able to access the full Resource Directory to find addresses and phone numbers. They are able to print any or all of the Reentry

Packet, they can learn how to use a mouse, create files and folders to hold their resume, and develop the computer skills necessary to take the GED. They can learn about the Personal Web Page, the incredible opportunities available on the Educate Yourself page and see the links to the career websites that will have the most up-to-date information regarding careers and job openings once they are released. Presently the 1 GB software is ready for stand-alone computers, but the organization hopes to have the thin-zero-client software version available in early 2015.

For the institutions that are not ready to utilize the software, Fair Shake offers an 88 page Reentry Packet, which contains a variety of information addressed in the software and on the website. Creative and industrious inmates in a number of institutions have built a reentry curriculum around the Reentry Packet. One of these groups is the Ray Brook Reentry Initiative in Ray Brook, New York, Fair Shake is now collaborating with the group to create worksheets and discussion questions to post on the website and send out with packets.

An inmate at FCI Oxford, who used the packet to create curriculum, shared the following comment:
Each member of our class was able to successfully develop a personal Roadmap to Reentry (an individual reentry plan) by incorporating the tools and information in the Fair Shake Reentry Packet! It addressed so many of the concerns that men had as they sought to successfully transition as contributing assets to their families, communities and employers.

Fair Shake is now working on a Reentry Kit that staff and inmates can use as a base to create their unique reentry classes. The kit will include up to 30 Reentry Packets, worksheets and discussion questions, short videos for each of the classes as well as a PowerPoint and a copy of the software (with no installation limit).

If you would like to check out the Computer Basics tutorial, the Resource Directory or a Reentry Packet, please visit www.fairshake.net. For a brief introduction to the features of our website or to share your vision of successful reentry, call Kristen or Sue: 608-634-6363, or send them an email: information@fairshake.net.