

## **Fruits of the Community**

*“For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.” - Rudyard Kipling*

We often receive emails and letters from people expressing gratitude for what Fair Shake has done for them. We want you all to know that the strength of Fair Shake comes from the community. Building this community is critical in the process of creating effective change. The stronger our community gets, the stronger society becomes!

We are happy to report that the community has borne many fruits. In the past year we have seen significant growth in our Trulincs readership and our communications with people incarcerated in state institutions. We have added many new pages to the website in response to community requests and ideas, experienced an increase in Trulincs participation, and have identified many Torch Bearers in the process. Many thanks to all of you who are spreading the word!

We hope to inspire and encourage many more to join this awesome community. Our community-building is in the early stages and we are looking forward to growing it with you. Ubuntu!

### **Torchbearers**

Uniting people to work towards a common goal is not an easy task under any circumstances. It usually involves working through individual agendas, and also barriers created within a community. Then add to that the agendas and barriers that the community faces in pursuing its goals within the community. The challenges that arise can have the potential to inspire the community to become more cohesive, or they can create riffs that sabotage goals, but they can also support individuals to become more creative and resilient. During this part of the process it is critical that each member learns to share ideas and concerns, but equally, or possibly *more* importantly, learns to listen.

As we engaged in conversations around personal development and creating ways to demonstrate prosocial intentions prior to release, we found exceptionally active and thoughtful individuals and groups in many institutions. We now call these individuals “Torchbearers”; they shine light of intentional and engaged thinking into the darkness of hesitation, fear, and confusion. These groups and individuals are directing positive change instead of waiting for whatever change might befall them. They are creating workshops and conversations locally. They are always ready to engage with the large group (which is growing every day!) when we need them to answer queries, create documents from scratch, or share something that they’ve created or learned about. They are collaboratively crafting a powerful cultural shift inside that will carry over to the outside. Harnessing power from within has just begun!

Our goal is to find ways to prove pro-social behaviors and intentions during incarceration. Peer-Learning through engagement in workshops or discovering new ways to present proof of change is a great way to get started. We want to facilitate ideas and discussions on a virtual level and ask that you do so locally through workshops and study groups. This will bolster our community network and therefore our effectiveness.

We believe that the Torchbearers will assist us in showing proof of the awesome things that are going on inside. We are building a library of ‘best practices’ (also known as tried and true good ideas) which we believe have the greatest impact when they are created inside.

We encourage you all to reflect, philosophize, share ideas, ask questions and deeply consider your goals and aspirations, and ways of achieving them. From our conversations we can build the Reentry Safety Net many people seek.

Torchbearer is not a label or position, but an attitude, a perspective, a shift in belief. All members of the community are invaluable.

Building this community is challenging for many reasons. We must be determined, tenacious, and patient as we address the many barriers we encounter. These barriers exist inside and outside of prison. Torchbearers preserve and enhance community effectiveness. We hope that others will be inspired to join them. All are welcome!

### **Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Authors**

We created an Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Authors page on our website/software to showcase the literary accomplishments of incarcerated people. It is no easy feat to write a book in prison! We want our website visitors and all stakeholders to have access to these works as we learn about them and have the opportunity to review them. We hope that by listing the books, the public will learn more about the skills and creativity found in our prisons, and we also hope to inspire more writers!

Our criteria for listing book listed is as follows:

- The author must be currently or formerly incarcerated.
- The titles we list must have been written during incarceration.
- The book must have a positive message over all.
- The book must be purchasable through Amazon or other DOC/BOP approved internet sources.

### **THANK YOU Incarcerated Donors!!!!**

We want to extend our deepest gratitude to the incarcerated donors for supporting our work and also for supporting the distribution of free reentry packets! The Reentry Packet costs over \$5.00 with postage, so every donation makes a serious impact on another incarcerated person's life. Donations also support our presentation travels.

We are especially grateful to these donors because we know the worth of five dollars on the inside, where most jobs pay less than \$.25 per hour. We also understand the financial strain that accompanies incarceration. Every little bit helps! Your donation makes a difference.

Thank you, you are appreciated by all!

### **Testimonials from our Trulinks readers, BOP and state-incarcerated 'torchbearers' and even staff:**

*I am working with individuals one on one with Study Guides. I am working with eight right now. I am able to help with resources and prepare them with what they will need when they are released.*

**- Tim B.**

Here is the complement of the day for your organization:

*"I got my booklet and started to page through it. The next thing I knew it was 3 hours later and it was count and I didn't even realize that I had been going through the information that long... it is that interesting. Please tell that lady Thank You!*

**- Comment from Wisconsin**

*We value the sincerity in your assistance to us. I was fortunate to have Ms. Kastensen come speak here and her enthusiasm and optimism really inspired me to help others!*

**- Steven S.**

*When I first saw what Fair shake could do I was truly amazed. I hope we get Fair Shake here! I think Fair Shake offers value to anyone willing to put in the time! I will be on Fair Shake as soon as I get out.*

**- Jeffrey P.**

*Thank you, Terrell, for your excellent message and the great work you, Sue, and the team at Fair Shake are doing. Any way I, as an incarcerated individual in a federal correctional institution, can help, please let me know. Can you send me a copy of your Re-entry Guide for use in our Career Resource Center? I would greatly appreciate it as we have over 1,600 inmates here who can benefit from your resources.*

**- Robert W.**

*First thank you very much for all you do for us. Prior to knowing about Fair Shake, I had to do hours upon hours of research just to find release resources for one individual that participated in the class I taught.*

**- Anthony H.**

*The most valuable about you all to me is that you give us outlines to all things that we need to be prepared for upon our release. Fair Shake addresses our needs by giving all the info that we need to better ourselves and let us know that we can make it if we want to and stay on a positive path to change.*

**- Sean A.**

*I feel that you really care about reentry and that is extremely important to people who are incarcerated. Doesn't seem like many people, even staff here, care about the felons re-entering society and being successful. Fair Shake has addressed my needs by sending me the reentry handbook. There were some useful information / tips in there that I used to create my resume and consider the topics on what one might expect to happen upon release...about getting frustrated, angry, sad etc. Thank you for doing awesome work.*

**- Adam S.**

*Your workshop guides are thought-provoking and require the reader not only to read, but to think and respond. The 'build a budget' worksheet is another example since many people who've come to prison did not live by a budget. I think that any time you can create information and make the reader interact, you will have a better chance of helping that person. It is also very important to remember to know your audience and use words, phrases, and such that you know they will understand and accept.*

**- Anthony H.**

*We see Fair Shake as \*extremely engaged, pro-active, and focused directly on the \*whole experience\* involved in an ex-offender's re-entry into society. Fair Shake is the ONLY entity that we've come across so far, who speaks \*directly\* to incarcerated people about re-entry. We believe Fair Shake's information to be realistic, up-to-date, and that F.S. is truly a "partner" to the ex-offender in his/her release and re-entry preparation. You've "taken the \*challenge\* to the source!" More than anything, we believe Fair Shake's information and approach provides any man or woman who decides to reach out the chance for some real moral support during their time of incarceration, and helps them face what may be/is to come. We are very appreciative of F.S.'s efforts to get the offline version (DVD-driven) into the F-BOP facilities. We realize, from a first-hand view, that this is a challenging effort. BUT, we believe institution administration will see the positives in making the software available.*

**-Chris W.**

*When I was first introduced to fair Shake I thought it was just another organization that provided limited resources and mostly served the organization rather than those facing reentry, which has an adverse effect on the incarcerated individuals and society alike. I was immediately impressed that Fair Shake provided thousands of nation-wide resources as well as employment tools for both incarcerated individuals and employers alike. This set Fair Shake apart in my mind right away I knew it was different from anything I'd ever seen. What I thought at the time was that the powers that be are finally listening to us and truly addressing our needs.*

*What makes Fair Shake so unique is that it covers all bases, even more thoroughly than I would have thought to as an incarcerated individual myself. Fair Shake offered what all the other reentry organizations had offered in terms of tangible resources. And still managed to go a step further and offer guidance or opportunity for growth in the intangible areas, something I've found to be the most important issues. I found the Reentry Packet to be a very comprehensive guide for not only the use of its resources, the use of computers, which is something that I've heard many express the need for and fear of. I was impressed that you could read through the pages of the packet and get a basic understanding of computer use without having a computer at your disposal, this was priceless and builds confidence to explore more. I continued to read the entire packet in one sitting, amazed at how different and thorough Fair Shake had been at providing resources, instructions, and insight on issues not only concerning reentry, but life in general. I felt like it was done so efficiently that only an incarcerated individual could have created it. 'Finally someone gets it.' I said to myself. Fair Shake's approach speaks to this perfectly in their acknowledgement of these issues. They do so without pointing and screaming "you need to change!" but strategically placing the intangible tools among the resources that incarcerated individuals openly acknowledge as a need. Placing the vitamins in the candy bar, so to speak. Making it easily digestible for those who may have not been looking to "change" their lives.*

*The most impressive tool that Fair Shake offers is the Ownership Manual, which provides guidance and information that assists in life skills. This is done without saying that something is wrong with you, but that the information is for anyone who wants to improve their quality of life. Most incarcerated individuals I've encountered, including myself, have been told that they're "not good enough", or made to feel that something is wrong with their lives. The Ownership Manual and other Fair Shake tools provide the opportunity for change without implying that an individual need "fixing". This is an important way to be effective with the prevalent mentality of the incarcerated.*

*The Reentry Packet spoke to all the areas of life that I had come to terms needed addressing in my quest to change, something I've never seen from any organization dealing with reentry. We were so impressed with the Fair Shake reentry packet that my co-worker and I decided to not only petition the staff to make the resources available in the future, but to immediately start a workshop using the Reentry Packet as a guide because it encompassed what so many of the other programs provided but with the personal touch of understanding and collaboration, instead of the usual do this and we'll check that box. It provided an opportunity for individuals to move at their own pace without judgement and take responsibility for their own reentry at every turn, invoking lessons of responsibility while creating an open platform for discussions about change. The response was overwhelming with the waiting list being over a month long.*

*The workshops planted a seed that carried over into the creation of an Inmate Reentry Council that is inmate led and staff advised. The uniqueness of Fair Shake's approach, coupled with the resources, creates a sense of a supportive community through their non-judgmental views and conversational tone. Fair Shake truly provides a Fair Shake.*

**- Terrell H.**