

Chipping Away at the Cultural Wall

February 28, 2016 | By Andrew Garber | DOC Communications



5 TEACH students ([Tim Kelly](#) , DOC Communications)

CLALLAM BAY – Behind the concertina wire and concrete walls, dozens of inmates gather in classrooms each day to discuss math, politics, religion, history and even creative writing.

While some of the classes are for college credit, most are held just for the sake of learning. And the courses are rapidly growing in popularity among inmates, who credit them not only with increasing their understanding of the world, but also with breaking down racial and cultural barriers.

“It’s helping us bridge gaps,” said Andre Parker, 34, a member of the [Black Prisoners’ Caucus](#), which started the education program, called [Taking Education and Creating History](#), or TEACH, in 2013.

Pointing to a white inmate sitting next him in a classroom, Parker said “I might never have even spoken to him in here (prison), ever. Now he comes to class, and if I see him out there I’ll say ‘hey man, how’s it going?’ And his friends see that, and it starts bridging things.”

The TEACH program, which started with a handful of students and a couple of courses, has grown to encompass more than 100 inmates and a long list of courses that offer students a path to college degrees. It’s operated through volunteers, private donations and the inmates’ own money. No state dollars are used.

Research nationally indicates that providing an education significantly reduces recidivism after release, but Sandra Diimmel, [Clallam Bay Corrections Center](#)’s (CBCC) education director, says the TEACH program does much more.

“It’s changed peoples’ mindsets,” Diimmel said. “We’re actually getting inmates who want holds (on transfers to other prisons) so they can stay here. And who wants to stay at Clallam Bay?” she said, noting the prison’s location on the Olympic Peninsula, outside Forks, is a long way from most inmates’ friends and family.

Black Prisoners’ Caucus

Diimmel and others credit Kimonti Carter, a 36-year old inmate serving a life without parole sentence, for his efforts to help launch the program.

Carter was transferred to CBCC in April of 2012, after spending more than a decade at the Monroe Correctional Complex. He was president of the Black Prisoners’ Caucus at Monroe. That group was instrumental in creating a higher education program at the prison called [University Beyond Bars](#).

Carter said that when he arrived at Clallam Bay, there was no [Black Prisoners’ Caucus](#). Although there were education programs to earn high school equivalency diplomas and learn certain technical skills, there was no way to earn a college degree.

Leaning on his experience at [Monroe Corrections Complex](#), (MCC), Carter, with the help of other inmates, won support from the prison administration to start a Black Prisoners’ Caucus.

“It gave us the opportunity to get back into the natural order of things. How do we improve our community, how do we improve men who are going home soon? What can we do to help guys get educated and do something more productive with their sentence?” Carter said.

The caucus then came up with the idea of TEACH, and earned support for that program as well.

Mark Black, an assistant to Associate Superintendent Jeri Boe, said he had his doubts about what the inmates were doing at first. “I was trying to find out what is the agenda, what is the motive,” he recalled. “I had to look into it to realize there can be acts of selflessness. They worked tirelessly to get this done.”

As a new program, TEACH didn’t have the resources to bring in instructors from universities or community colleges, and it’s a long drive for volunteer instructors. So the inmates wrote to college professors, asking them for advice on how to teach courses themselves.

TEACH started off with a Survey of African American History course, but soon branched out into other subjects and reached out to other inmates in the prison.

“For many of the guys, once you begin to get involved, it begins to change the way you think and the way you see things. The way you problem solve and view the world and your position in it,” Carter said.

“Going to school is actually giving me, not only the opportunity to learn a few things, but also to become wiser in the process,” he said. “Then it’s something that you want other people to be able to experience.”

Creating Good Things

In the beginning, because TEACH was started by the Black Prison Caucus, there was some skepticism by other inmates that “oh, this is just something for the black guys,” Carter said.

But that soon changed and TEACH began running classes with students from a broad spectrum of the prison population.

“Generally there’s a lot of separation in prison. Whether it be skinheads or street gangs,” said Stephen Young, 33, a TEACH student who is serving a life without parole sentence. “We’re all coming together and helping to bridge the gaps between groups. It’s kind of a cool thing really. It’s nothing that I’ve experienced in prison before. And it’s creating good things.”

John Galdamez, 36, agreed, noting that TEACH “has helped out the Hispanic community a lot because (the prison) didn’t have an ESL (English as a Second Language) class. TEACH started an ESL class and it’s a way to help educate others. This is chipping away at the wall.”

Some of the courses offer college credit, but many are designed simply to broaden inmates understanding of the world around them, or bring their literacy skills up to a level where they can take college-credit courses.

Nearly 30 percent of inmates at the prison do not have a high school degree or its equivalent. The majority of inmates’ have less than a 9th grade level in math, and 29 percent have less than a 9th grade reading level.

“We’re going through a political science course now,” Carter said, “and a lot of the guys coming out of that class are saying ‘now, when I watch debates and politics on the news, I actually understand what’s going on. I understand the difference between a conservative, and a moderate or a liberal, and what it is that they’re arguing over.’ ”

TEACH has high hopes for expanding its offerings and has reached out to other prisons to see if there could be a way to transfer course credits between prisons when inmates are moved.

There’s an element of selfishness in all this, as well, inmates said, in that having inmates go through the classes provides for more interesting discussions outside of class.

“Our conversations are vast,” Carter said.

<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/opinion/alternative-justice-fines-prosecutors.html?referer=https://www.google.com/>

OPINION | OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Justice Shouldn't Come With a \$250 Fine



By Alexes Harris
Jan. 3, 2018

For those who hope to see the criminal justice system operate more fairly, this is an exciting time in the United States. Cities and counties across the country have recently elected a new wave of reform-minded prosecutors. But the fines and debt that many of them want to use instead of incarceration can be just as unfair and ineffective as the long sentences they say they reject.

In November, Nueces County, Tex., elected a progressive district attorney, Mark Gonzalez. His [platform](#) included a promise that he wouldn't prosecute misdemeanor marijuana offenses but would instead mandate a \$250 fine and a drug class. That same month, [Larry Krasner](#), who ran on expanding the use of drug courts and diversion programs as alternatives to incarceration, was elected district attorney in Philadelphia.

While it's understandable that the election of prosecutors like these who are committed to finding options other than locking people up — a key part of criminal justice reform — has inspired excitement, real change to the system will require that they go a step further to ensure that alternative punishments aren't an unreasonable financial burden.

Too often, this is the case. The fine for a misdemeanor is typically about \$1,000, which can be unmanageable for a low-income person. This comes on top of many other costs. The application fee [a defendant must pay to hire a public defender](#) (appointed because a person charged with a crime cannot afford to pay for an attorney) can be as high as \$400. [Jail booking fees](#) range from \$10 to \$100. In some states, defendants can be made to pay fees upward of \$200 for the juries who hear their cases. After conviction, [victim's panel classes](#), where some defendants are mandated to hear about victims' experiences and loss, can cost up to \$75. Drug courts can and often do make people pay for their own assessment, treatment and frequent drug testing.

This system shifts the costs of our criminal justice system to the people processed by the system. Juvenile, traffic, misdemeanor and felony courts all [rely on monetary sanctions](#). Fines, court-user fees, surcharges, assessments, interest, collection and per-payment fees fund everything from

local law enforcement departments to county jails. Even some municipal services not connected to law enforcement, like [campaign elections](#), are paid for by fines and fees imposed on citizens convicted of — or simply accused of — breaking the law.

These people are paying for the system of justice from which we all benefit, but they cannot afford to do so. They [are often poor, unemployed and of color](#). In [research on monetary sanctions in nine states](#), my research team and I found that many people have trouble navigating the legal process associated with fines and fees, like finding out how much money they owe and meeting minimum payment requirements. Of the 380 people we interviewed, over half received public assistance and a vast majority had problems paying their legal debt. Many people with court debt suffered added consequences related to their indigence — like difficulty meeting other financial obligations, and mental and physical ailments. They also had to answer to the court for their nonpayment.

Fines for drug offenses, in particular, can have long-term consequences for people who are unable to pay. In many jurisdictions, if a person cannot pay a court-imposed fine, probation is lengthened, [warrants are issued](#) and he or she can even be [jailed for nonpayment](#). The burden is piled on, as interest, surcharges and collection fees are added to unpaid court costs.

It doesn't have to be this way. While prosecutors do not directly fine defendants, they have discretion when it comes to which fines and fees they recommend to judges. New prosecutors who are serious about making progressive changes should be aware that alternatives to incarceration like diversion programs and classes and treatment come at a cost — literally.

They can reform the justice system without adding the financial burden of fees and classes that defendants must pay for. They should instead search for ways to reduce criminal justice budgets by prioritizing preventive measures [proved](#) to decrease recidivism and improve public safety such as free drug and alcohol treatment programs, low-cost housing, restorative justice and job training. To start, lower courts should rely on [day fines](#), where monetary sanctions are determined based on a person's daily wage and the seriousness of the offense. The sanction is proportionate to a person's ability to pay and the degree of harm inflicted. Jurisdictions could reduce justice-related budgets by restructuring drug-sentencing laws to match public opinion and revise the use of mandatory minimum, long-term and life sentences.

New prosecutors have the power to stop coloring within the lines of our unjust, unfair and unrealistic systems of justice. By not using punishments that impose financial costs on people, they can create a system that is not reliant on user fees and that improves the way we process, punish and support people charged with and convicted of crimes. Of course, poor defendants who are convicted of crimes should be punished. But let's hold them accountable without building huge debts they cannot pay.

Alexes Harris is a professor of sociology at the University of Washington, the author of “A Pound of Flesh: Monetary Sanctions as a Punishment for the Poor” and a member of the Scholars Strategy Network.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/hello-my-name-is-felon_us_59d77b7be4b08ce873a8cd09

Emily Andrews, Contributor

Hello, My Name Is Felon.

What we call those who have been incarcerated has a drastic impact on their self-esteem and prospects for progress.

10/06/2017 08:51 am ET Updated Oct 06, 2017



What we should call people with a criminal history and why does it matter?

What is the worst thing you've ever done?

Now imagine being known by that one mistake — regardless of what you've done to take responsibility or make amends. You have to write it on the top of every application for employment or housing you ever fill out—for the rest of your life.

Labels are powerful, and our society has plenty for people who have been through the criminal justice system and have the record to show for it: *Felon. Offender. Convict. Criminal.*

Even *inmate* casts a dark shadow in its rightful context. An *inmate* is just a number — identified by numbers on a uniform. Personhood is revoked. When we call people offenders and convicts, we identify them by what they have done, not by their basic human dignity.

But why does it really matter what people with a criminal history are called? It turns out that the labels aren't primarily a matter of political correctness, but of public safety.

A FACE TO THE NAME

The land of the free incarcerates more people than any country in the world — almost 2.2 million, according to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#). Ninety-five percent of those in state prisons will be released, facing widespread social stigma and legal restrictions that hinder them from giving back to society ([check out some of the most outrageous ones here](#)). And every year, prisons release 600,000 people back into their communities.

That's a lot of people to relegate to the fringes of society, even after their debt is paid. And the labels we give them have the power to change how they think about themselves and their potential.

“When someone can never shake the label ‘offender,’ it’s as if the time or work they put into paying their debt means nothing,” says Heather Rice-Minus, vice president of government affairs at Prison Fellowship.

Prison Fellowship holds to the belief that all people have God-given value, dignity, and the potential to change. People are not the sum of their worst choices. As an organization and as a community, we want our language to reflect that — to lend to a culture that helps people with a criminal record in making important contributions to society and living up to their God-given potential. And everybody’s story is different.

Randy Anderson, who served time in prison on drug charges, now works as an addiction counselor at the same facility where he began his journey to recovery. Read more of his story [here](#).

[Christopher Poulos’ story](#) took a turn in high school. First came the prescription drugs. Later it was cocaine, felony charges, and two and a half years in federal prison.

Grappling with addiction behind bars, he entered a recovery program and took every step to prepare for a productive life on the outside. Upon his release, he found a job, continued his recovery, and even went to law school, serving with task forces on addiction and criminal justice policy. He managed to pass the bar after an unusually lengthy and strenuous process, and today he serves as executive director at an addiction-treatment center.

But like hordes of other returning citizens written off as “ex-offenders” and “criminals,” Christopher faced roadblocks because of his felony record — a plight he compares to serving a life sentence.

“When other people identify me using strongly stigmatizing terms such as ‘felon,’ ‘addict,’ ‘junkie,’ ‘drug abuser,’ or ‘convict,’ it immediately places me in the category of being ‘other,’” says Christopher. “Putting ‘ex-’ in front of any of those terms does not effectively mitigate the harm. I can’t speak for others, but I imagine that for some people... stigmatizing language has similar effects on them that it has had on me. I have seen a lot of people put themselves in a box, limiting their own future potential, because of their pasts.”

Gina Evans has found this to be true throughout her recovery journey, too. The Minnesota mom found freedom from meth addiction and now works at a rehab and recovery center to help others find healing from life-controlling issues.

“Once you have that scarlet letter on your forehead that says ‘Felon,’ everything becomes difficult,” says Evans. “But God brought me through all the things I’ve been through for such a time as this ... to bring hope and help to others. My kids have their mom back, my mom has her daughter back.”

Thoughtful language is about recognizing the perceptions that language so powerfully reinforces, for good or for bad. It's about affording dignity to those who wish to reclaim their identity as *people*.

Not "junkies" or "addicts," but people who struggle with addiction.

Not "offenders" or "convicts," but incarcerated men and women.

Not "ex-cons" or "criminals," but returning citizens.

TEARING OFF NAMETAGS

How we label people directly affects how we choose to invest in them during their incarceration and after their release. If we see those who break the law as criminals, offenders, and nothing more, we are less inclined to believe in their capability to change. The same labels affect the way people with a criminal record view themselves.

They wonder, "Can I ever be part of the community? Do I have something to contribute? Am I important?"

And what they believe about themselves will affect how they approach the journey forward.

Language contributes to a culture of hope. Poor terminology can have a negative effect, not just on the incarcerated men and women who are trying to change, but on the healing process of those who have suffered because of crime. That's why some people prefer "survivor" instead of "victim," or drop the label altogether to say "harmed party" or "person who has been harmed by crime."

It's not about being politically correct. It's about being conscious of the weight of our words and helping people begin to reclaim their true identities — wherever they are on their journey. And wherever that may be, they matter. A corrections officer once wondered how those under her supervision would like to be known. If it were up to them, how might they be called? She asked, and the group offered various answers — inmate, prisoner, resident.

Then the corrections officer said, "What about just 'woman'?"

They all acted surprised. They hadn't even considered that one.

"You may be a man or woman in prison today," says Heather Rice-Minus, "but we are all sons and daughters together at the foot of the cross. Your identity is a child of God. You are capable, through Christ, of transformation. Our worst days do not define us... This is not about ignoring the crime and what the person owes for that wrong — it's about holding people accountable, while recognizing that there is nothing any of us can do to separate us from the love of God and the human dignity He bestowed upon each of us."

<https://www.sarasotamagazine.com/articles/2017/8/28/road-to-redemption>

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Road to Redemption

Formerly incarcerated residents struggle to rebuild their lives and overcome the stigma of serving time.

By [Cooper Levey-Baker](#) 8/28/2017 at 5:00am Published in the [September 2017](#) issue of *Sarasota Magazine*

It was Feb. 1, 2002, and Sal D'Angelo wanted to hide. D'Angelo, a wiry 5 feet, 10 inches tall 21-year-old with tattoos of a cross on his right leg and a wizard on his right arm, had just been released after 16 months in Lancaster Correctional Institute in Trenton, Florida, and another year in a Hillsborough County jail. His mother had picked him up and brought him to her home in Tampa. But instead of being elated, he was terrified. "I didn't want to get out of the house," he says. "I was scared to go back into society."

Lancaster had been a nightmare, he says, a "gladiator camp" where brawls broke out between squads of prisoners segregated according to their hometowns. And the violence wasn't limited to the prisoners. On the bus to prison, a guard cracked D'Angelo in the face for sticking the tip of his toe into the aisle.

By age 13, D'Angelo was already what he calls a "full-blown addict." He was born in Far Rockaway, New York, a rough section of Queens that was home to gangs divided along racial lines. D'Angelo's father was an alcoholic. His mother was addicted to crack cocaine. As a teenager, D'Angelo used cocaine, PCP, angel dust and ecstasy. "I took a super-nose-dive right into the streets," he says. "There was nowhere else to go."

He says drugs also helped him kill the shame of sexual abuse. When D'Angelo was 10, an older cousin began molesting him, and he had no one to turn to. D'Angelo's mother had moved to Tampa and left him with his father, who drank all day in his auto repair shop and brought D'Angelo with him to bars. D'Angelo served as a "beer boy," fetching drinks for his father and his pals and munching on the cocktail fruit in the trays behind the bar.

His father eventually got sober, but when D'Angelo began stealing to buy drugs, his father sent him to live with his mother. In Tampa, D'Angelo's habit grew worse. Stealing bikes from back porches and golf clubs from garages led to more serious crimes.

On Nov. 16, 1999, D'Angelo was behind the wheel of a red Ford Probe when a friend reached out and snatched a purse from a woman in a Walmart parking lot. D'Angelo accelerated, and the pair escaped with \$448 in cash and goods. Twelve days later, they repeated the crime, this time in a Publix parking lot, making off with \$230. Arrested two weeks later, D'Angelo was charged with strong-arm robbery, burglary, grand theft and dealing in stolen property. He went to prison the next year.

After he was released, he says, "I wanted to do good. I wanted to be a good person."

But he didn't have the courage or the guidance to cut ties with old friends. He hadn't told his buddies he was coming home, but they heard the news; and when they came around a week later, they wanted to celebrate, which meant getting drunk and getting high. D'Angelo made it five months before being arrested again.

America locks up more of its citizens than any other country on earth. Home to 4.4 percent of the world's population, the United States [is also home to 22 percent of the world's prisoners](#), a population that [has increased fivefold](#) in the last 40 years. More than 6.7 million Americans, [one out of every 37 citizens](#), are under some type of correctional control, and more than [2.2 million are in a state or federal prison or local jail](#).

Almost all of them will at some point get out. Each year, [650,000 people are released from federal and state prisons](#). In an average week in Sarasota County, five people are coming home from a stint in prison and seven are returning to Manatee County.

Once home, they face daunting hurdles. Many owe court fees and must make restitution payments, and they're vulnerable to credit scams and predatory loans. In Florida, anyone convicted of drug trafficking can't receive welfare benefits and food stamps, while felons with drug or violence convictions within the past five years can't get help through the Sarasota Housing Authority's voucher program or live in public housing. All felons in Florida lose the right to vote.

Such restrictions are known as "collateral consequences," and there are [more than 1,200 such consequences](#) on the books in Florida alone. They disproportionately affect minorities. In Florida, [48.1 percent of prison inmates are black](#), while blacks make up [just 16.8 percent of the state's population](#).

And along with all the consequences of imprisonment, many criminals are ill-equipped to compete and succeed in society. "Many people enter prison with educational deficits, as well as limited or sporadic employment histories, housing instability and mental health and substance abuse issues," says Janeen Buck Willison, a senior fellow with the Justice Policy Center at the [Urban Institute](#) in Washington, D.C. Addressing the "multitude of those needs" is critical for successful re-entry, she says, but most former prisoners "have tenuous social support."

Often unable to afford to live on their own, newly freed individuals frequently turn to friends and family for help, but those relationships may be dysfunctional. And many ex-prisoners return to the neighborhoods where they committed their crimes, places where harsh memories and temptation lurk.

It's also hard for former prisoners to find work. [One study](#) found that white job applicants with criminal backgrounds are 50 percent less likely to get called back for an interview than those with similar credentials but no criminal record; black applicants with criminal backgrounds are 64 percent less likely to be interviewed. Some ex-cons are hired by day labor firms or lawn maintenance companies, but most struggle to find a position that will give them a path forward. In addition, many landlords refuse to rent to applicants with felony convictions.



After her release from prison, says Tammica Summers, “I was drowning in freedom.”

Tammica Summers, 44, spent almost 12 years locked up for her role in a 2002 murder. Summers was working as an escort when her boyfriend beat one of her clients to death. Her first days out were difficult. “I was overwhelmed with freedom,” she says. “It was drowning me. I had figured out a way to do time. But I had to figure out a way to be free again.”

The only home Summers could find was at a Bradenton motel that rented by the week, and when she applied for a job at a car wash, she was rejected. “That’s a blow, when a car wash doesn’t want you,” Summers says. “All they see is someone convicted of murder.” She worked in the adult entertainment business, then got a job at Dunkin’ Donuts. Summers eventually saved up enough to purchase a trailer and worked at a Goodwill Manasota store. She recently opened a flea market stall selling beauty products.

But she still feels the stigma. Summers often uses a fake name so new acquaintances can’t Google her. She is estranged from her three children and she feels isolated. “I don’t associate with anyone. I’m paranoid. I can understand why a lot of people get the thought, ‘I might as well go back to prison,’” Summers says.

Even charges that don’t result in time served can have lasting consequences. When he was 18, Bradenton’s Tim Swart stole two golf carts. Charged with two felony counts of grand theft of a motor vehicle, he was sentenced to probation and 50 hours of community service.

The crimes still follow him. Through a temp agency, Swart was working maintenance at an apartment complex. After a year, the complex owners wanted to hire him, which would have given him a full-time position and higher pay. But when they learned about his criminal background, they explained the complex’s rules prohibit hiring people with criminal convictions. “It screwed me out of a job,” says Swart, now 24. “It was pretty much a flat, ‘No, we can’t do it.’”

The world changes while you’re locked up. Summers received text messages on the cell phone she got after being released, but she broke down in tears because she didn’t know how to send a message back. Former prisoners struggle with using the internet to search for jobs and even basic activities like activating automated sinks in public restrooms and choosing what food to eat after years of meals selected and prepared by others.

Over 52 percent of Americans released from prison [are arrested again within eight years](#), and in Florida, [47 percent of prisoners](#) are behind bars for the second, third, fourth or even fifth time. All those additional charges

mean additional victims, and recidivism also adds to the state's financial burden. Florida [spent \\$1.9 billion on prisons in 2015](#)—\$19,069 per inmate, or \$95 per Florida resident.

In Sarasota, a handful of social programs assist newly released offenders. One committed to the mission is [Project 180](#), a nonprofit founded in 2008 by Barbara Richards.

Richards spends most days in a nondescript office donated by the chemical company SimChem, answering calls from newly released individuals and their family members. The nonprofit also organizes an annual lecture series on criminal justice topics, and its volunteers, including bankers, restaurateurs, day labor managers and career counselors, travel with Richards to nearby prisons to teach job-search basics and lead financial literacy classes in the Sarasota County jail.

Project 180 classes are informative, even upbeat and inspiring. The inmates are quick to laugh, and they ask sharp questions about how to handle car payments, how to explain a criminal history to a potential employer and whether you must pay income tax on the money that goes into your 401(k). Susan Brothers, a Sarasota branch manager with Iberia Bank, teaches the basics of saving and investing at the Sarasota County jail. “Of all the volunteer work I’ve ever done,” she says, “I feel like I’m giving back the most here.”

Many former prisoners also struggle with addiction. One study found that almost [50 percent](#) of current inmates are clinically addicted, and [about 18 percent](#) of inmates say they committed their crimes to get money for drugs. That ratio is higher for those arrested in Sarasota, says Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight: “Most of our crime is fueled by addiction.”

When D’Angelo was arrested in 1999, he signed up for an Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous rehabilitation program to lessen his sentence, but the program didn’t stick. Neither did a 28-day program in upstate New York where his father had finally gotten clean. The truth, he now says: He didn’t want to get help.

After getting out in 2002, he started selling drugs and stealing to finance his next high, and the crimes began to pile up, from marijuana possession and traffic violations to an open container misdemeanor that led to an arrest because he skipped his arraignment. In 2008, he was arrested in Sarasota while pushing a cart filled with \$30 worth of stolen aluminum down the road. Charged with burglary, he didn’t show up for his court date and was arrested again. When not in jail, D’Angelo lived in the streets and flopped at crack houses.

“Drugs make you not care about nothing,” D’Angelo says. “You just want more, more, more. You’ll steal out of your mom’s purse. You’ll snatch an old lady’s purse. It just takes over your mind and your soul.”

In 2009, D’Angelo overdosed near a Sarasota trailer park and collapsed in a ditch. When he woke up in detox, he knew he needed to change his life. But the realization was short-lived. He spent another year smoking crack and ingesting prescription pills.

D’Angelo remembers the exact date of his most recent arrest, the one he swears is his last: June 10, 2010. He was picked up at JCPenney while trying to buy clothes with a stolen credit card; the employee who called the cops reported that D’Angelo was “acting erratically.” The Sarasota County deputy who responded found D’Angelo in the men’s section with an armful of clothes. He was twitching, and his pupils were tiny pinpoints. His weight had dropped from 160 pounds to 145. When the officer searched him, he found marijuana and nine Oxycodone pills. D’Angelo told the deputy he had bought the pills for \$15 a pop from “a guy in a Mustang.”

He had also smoked crack earlier that day. After he was arrested, D'Angelo picked up an additional charge for selling five Roxicodone pills to an undercover cop for \$75 earlier that year.

People often told D'Angelo he'd be dead by 30. This time, he was determined to prove them wrong. He enrolled in a Sarasota County jail recovery program and moved into pod 5000 on the fifth floor. D'Angelo lived with 47 other male inmates committed to getting sober in a large room, with two tiers of cells overlooking an open area dotted with tables where the men, dressed in loose-fitting corrections-orange uniforms with "JAIL" printed on the right leg, would gather for intense sessions structured around the 12-step process. (A separate pod, pod 6000, works with 48 female inmates at a time.)

The program dug deeper than any previous program D'Angelo had tried. He filled hundreds of pages with reflections about his life, unearthing childhood memories as well as documenting his years behind bars. "I started learning about what I had to change and who I really am," he says. "I was 29 years old. I'd been on the streets my whole life. You have to start your whole life over and forget everything you've ever known. It's not simple." D'Angelo had always believed in God, prayed regularly and had even been baptized in prison, but recovery made his faith stronger.

After he was released, D'Angelo signed up for the Salvation Army's [Voluntary Interim Placement–Enhanced Recovery Program](#). He lived at the Salvation Army for five months, with three meals a day and access to doctors, counselors, dentists and pastors. After that, he lived in halfway houses and got a job waving a sign on the side of a street in the middle of summer, wearing a backpack stuffed with water bottles to survive the heat. "I winged it," he says. "I did what I had to do."

He had to pay thousands of dollars to the county before he could get a driver's license, so he rode a bike and took the bus for almost two years. He moved through the same streets he had passed through as an addict. He ran into old friends and turned away without saying anything. "I felt like an alien," he says.

In 2011, when a halfway house D'Angelo was living in fell apart, he didn't know what to do next. A friend suggested he call Adam Bollenbach, the parts and service manager at [Custom Carts](#), a business that builds and sells specialty golf carts. D'Angelo's father was an auto mechanic, and when D'Angelo was young, he would sit and watch his father work on cars every day. For D'Angelo, putting together a golf cart was like playing with Legos.

Bollenbach, a former addict with a rap sheet of his own, has a reputation for hiring men struggling with addiction. When Bollenbach met him, D'Angelo was in the early stages of recovery, twitchy and unsure of himself, but Bollenbach gave him a job. Bollenbach says that less than half of the ex-cons and recovering addicts he hires work out. Giving D'Angelo a chance was a gamble.



D'Angelo leads a crew of workers building golf carts at Sarasota's Custom Carts.

If you ran into Barbara Richards, you'd never guess she spends much of her time in prisons and with ex-cons. A slight woman with close-cropped white hair and thin wire glasses perched on her nose, she dons stylish dresses and suits for meetings. Richards, who's in her 60s, is amiable, but she's also intense and determined. Someone once called her "silent but deadly," a description she relishes.

Project 180 is creating a residential program that will house released offenders in a sober setting, with job connections, classes and volunteer work. The program is modeled on a similar program in California, the state where Richards first stepped inside a jail.

It wasn't where she thought she'd end up. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Richards attended Iowa's Grinnell College for three semesters before traveling to West Africa to visit her sister, who was in the Peace Corps. The experience inspired Richards to drop out of college and take off with \$300 and a one-way plane ticket. She spent a year in Australia and eventually moved to San Francisco. In California, she worked in the restaurant industry, got married and gave birth to two daughters. After a divorce, she went back to school and earned her bachelor degree. In 1997, she heard an NPR report about the low educational level of most prisoners. Today, 37 percent of Florida prisoners are reading at or below a fifth-grade level, and 71 percent are reading at or below a ninth-grade level.

"It was like having God tap me on the shoulder and say, 'Wake up. This is your work. Get busy,'" she says.

She vowed to begin working with inmates, but she was afraid. On the day she was set to interview for a job running an incarcerated men's support group, she pulled up to the gates at a jail in San Bruno, just south of San Francisco, looked at the towering buildings filled with inmates, and turned around and drove to a grocery store instead. She thought she couldn't do it, but while pushing the cart around the store, she resolved to try. She drove back and got the job.

Richards was told the men would either accept or reject her within the first few minutes. “They were kind enough to accept me,” she says, “and they were amazing, amazing people who, if they had been born into any other community or family or circumstance, would have been professionals, CEOs, teachers, attorneys, physicians. They were smart, funny, engaged.” Richards brought in readings that ranged from Plato to current psychology, talking with the inmates about how the words related to their own lives and time behind bars.



Barbara Richards helps lead a financial literacy class inside the Sarasota County jail.

She later got a full-time job running GED and adult education classes in other jail settings. One thing nagged: She kept seeing the same faces. Drug addiction “had a stranglehold on people,” she says. “These folks had no resources, and they went back to the street once they got out.” Richards decided to go back to school. She enrolled in Florida State University in 2004, studying the psychological impact of incarceration and the role of employment in rehabilitation.

After she graduated in 2006, she wanted to launch an offender re-entry nonprofit in Florida, home to only a few such programs. She moved to Tampa, but the arts and culture of Sarasota persuaded her to move south. Project 180 was incorporated in 2008.

Building the nonprofit—the arduous task of raising money, recruiting board members and volunteers—has taken time. Convincing people to support programs for felons is tougher than selling them on cuddlier causes. Project 180’s annual revenue in 2016 totaled only \$123,000.

The new program represents a significant step forward. An anonymous Sarasota businessman is purchasing a home and leasing it to Project 180. The facility will house six recently incarcerated individuals for two years, with a rotating staff of three, who will live with the offenders and manage the house. Transportation to and from work will be provided, and addiction recovery services will be integral. Richards believes that to reduce recidivism, our thinking about addiction must change. “Until we recognize addiction as a disease, rather than a choice or a lack of will, we will have a very difficult time turning around,” she says.

Refusing to see this reality incurs great costs, both socially and financially, she says. “We cannot incarcerate our way out of social issues, and to try to do so is going to bankrupt state and local governments,” Richards says.

Many officials in the criminal justice system are concerned about the Trump administration’s [“tough-on-crime” rhetoric](#) and [the possible return of harsh sentences](#) and policies that they say have been shown not to work. But Richards remains optimistic. “More and more, people are rejecting the idea that everybody who has been through the system needs to be thrown away,” she says. “Even though there might be individuals who

want to turn back the hands of time, just about everybody [else] knows that it is not a viable method of accomplishing what we all want, which is a safe community in which every individual has the opportunity to thrive.”

Knight also sees a “fundamental shift” in how America grapples with crime. “We’re tough on crime,” he says of his office, “but we’re also OK with helping people.” If parenting and financial literacy classes and addiction recovery services prevent future crimes from being committed, why shouldn’t jails offer them? Knight calls his jail’s approach the “pragmatic” one. “I truly believe it’s the future of incarceration,” he says.

On work days, D’Angelo, now 36, rises around 6:20 a.m. to make coffee. He has stayed lean, but the number of tattoos on his body has grown. Most are a testament to his faith, with depictions of Jesus and Calvary, rosary beads made out of the Serenity Prayer and a scroll emblazoned with Proverbs 28:1—“The wicked run while no one is chasing them, but the godly stand bold as lions.” A dragon symbolizes strength, a microphone references a passion for Christian rap and a Japanese koi fish swimming upstream portends good luck.

D’Angelo shares an apartment with his 31-year-old girlfriend, Erin Babich, now eight months pregnant with the couple’s first child. (D’Angelo also has a 5-year-old son and a 7-year-old daughter from previous relationships. Babich has a 10-year-old daughter.) The couple lives on the second floor of a two-story building in a small complex on Fruitville Road, the kind of place where the outdoor light fixtures are busted and where residents keep their blinds closed and doors locked even when they’re home.

They say they didn’t bother searching for something better, because they knew they’d be shut out. “People think once you’re a criminal, you’ll always be a criminal,” D’Angelo says. But D’Angelo and Babich have fixed up their apartment nicely, with a glass dining room table, woven placemats and art etched with inspirational quotes on the walls.



D’Angelo, Erin Babich and her daughter.

Babich spent six months in prison last year; she met D'Angelo at an AA meeting. D'Angelo remains active in recovery programs, chairing meetings and sharing his story and rapping about his experiences and his faith. He visits churches and detox facilities to talk with recovering addicts. "When someone asks me to speak or share, I feel like I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing if I tell that person, 'No,'" he says.

That includes speaking at Project 180 events. In May, D'Angelo participated in a lunchtime panel discussion that raised money for the nonprofit. Project 180 didn't exist when he got out of prison in 2002; if it had, perhaps it might have helped.

D'Angelo, along with formerly incarcerated individuals Terrance Blake and Deanna Zappi, spoke about their experiences in prison during a Project 180 panel discussion held in May and filmed by Manatee Educational Television

At 6:50, D'Angelo is out the door, driving to Custom Carts, where six years after being hired, D'Angelo now leads his own shop, with a crew of three to four workers. To make money on the side, he picks up extra work on golf carts, repairs cars and trucks and rescreens pool cages.

"He went through a lot of shit," Bollenbach says. "He had child support stuff, girlfriend issues, and he just kept plugging away. He always showed up, always went to meetings, and he stayed." Working alongside fellow employees going through recovery helped. Bollenbach says people are more likely to relapse when their colleagues are hanging out after hours smoking marijuana and drinking.

But despite a steady job and growing family, life for D'Angelo remains precarious. He can't afford health insurance, and in July 2016, a car rear-ended his vehicle, which put him out of work for four weeks. "I lost everything," he says. "I'm \$50,000 in debt and I live check to check." His phone buzzes regularly with calls from debt collectors.

"Right now, I'm struggling really bad," D'Angelo says. "I've got \$6 in my bank account. I've got about \$150 in my pocket. That's my whole life savings." He's cut his bills to the basics, and takes life day by day. Dreams of owning his own business are, for the moment, just that—dreams.

But whatever obstacles he faces today, he insists the past is the past. "Nothing will ever make me go back to the streets or get high or drink again," D'Angelo says. "I'm done."