



FRIENDS OF THE WAY HOME

Our Mission: To meet former prisoners at the prison gates and the office door in Georgetown to provide connections with community, meet needs, and foster relationships that prevent return to prison.

From the Director's Corner

December 2015



As I write these words, it is a little before 5:00 o'clock in the evening. The sky is a rich, vibrant rose, blooming behind darkened trees. Soon it will be the winter solstice – that ancient word with Latin roots, meaning “sun stands still”.

I would do well to do the same. Stand still. Listen. Feel the miracle of life in every breath, every sound. Ponder the mystery of God among us.

What will our next steps be, yours and mine? Will they be dancing, unsure, strong, limping, reckless? Will they be grounded in God's spirit?

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Thank You...

For responding so generously to The Way Home's annual appeal letter. In light of the recent budget cuts, the donations are most appreciated.

In case you didn't receive the letter or the letter may have gotten mixed in with other holiday greetings or other mail and you would still like to make a tax-deductible donation, please mail it to: **The Way Home, Inc.**

P. O. Box 1103

Georgetown, DE 19937

The Lifer's Group at Sussex Correctional Institution for honoring The Way Home with a letter, a salute of gratitude, and a donation of their hard-earned money.

A participant who received a car at a generous discount by The Way Home board saved diligently to buy a new car. He returned double the money he paid for the old car back The Way Home .



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Meet Your Board Member

At the risk of seeming cliché, the newest board member is truly a breath of fresh air. Although it was pouring like cats and dogs (another cliché) on the interview day, Claire Snyder Hall entered the cafe, shook her damp hair, smiled broadly her eyes dancing, and heartily shook hands in greeting.

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Since 1998, The Way Home has helped hundreds of ex-offenders stay out of prison, providing comprehensive case management for participants for less than one-sixth of the cost of incarceration.

An assessment, released in September 2012 by the School of Public Policy and Administration of the University of Delaware, covering the period 1999 through 2008, compared the recidivism of Way Home (WH) clients and Delaware Department of Corrections (DOC) detainees. Subject, released from Supervision Levels IV and V, were compared in marital status, gender, and race. Recidivism is defined as the return of ex-offenders to incarceration (prison or jail) due to either an arrest or a parole/probation violation.

The Way Home Program performed more effectively than Department of Corrections on all recidivism dimensions:

- **Over the 1999-2008 time period, the various recidivism analyses showed that the predicted odds of WH clients to NOT recidivate are 1.23 times the odds for DOC.**
- **Over a five-year period, the risk of recidivism for WH clients has been 57% of the risk for DOC ex-offenders.**
- **WH had lower proportions of their clients who recidivated in the first year of their release than DOC ex-offenders.**
- **WH clients experience a longer time period before recidivating.**
- **For any point in time after release WH clients had higher probability of not returning to incarceration.**
- **Women, Caucasians, married, and older ex-offenders and those released from Level V were less likely to experience recidivism and they manifested higher probabilities of avoiding recidivism than men, non-Caucasians, non-married and younger offenders.**

The present analyses and findings represent a preliminary evaluation. A longer time frame for analysis is needed for The Way Home programmatic experience so that more conclusive statements can be made regarding The Way Home's performance.

From the Director's Corner...continued from page 1

This past Sunday in a sermon given by Mother Eunice Dunlap at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Rehoboth Beach, we heard a meditation by Bishop Steven Charleston, a retired Native American Episcopal Bishop. Long a favorite of mine, his words sprang to life in this season of Advent – a season rushing like a mighty river, filled with violence and pain, with hope, with remembrance, toward Christmas.

“Gather your blessings about you. Draw the good that you have together. Do not let the broken world hypnotize you into imagining all is lost, but be constant in your faith that kindness still stands before the wind and will not be overturned. Hold fast to what you value, speak out the word of love. Trust the right to return even if the wrong seems forever. We were not made to play at believing, but to work at it with confident purpose. Our task is clear: be the open door of shelter without condition, the light of hope for all the world to see.”

May our steps be guided by these eternal, life-giving, life-sustaining principles, these brave, compassionate words of strength.

May we all draw courage, no matter how dark the night, how cold the winds.

May we, with God's help, be those open doors of shelter for one another, for the stranger, the wayfarer, without condition.

May kindness stand fast, as we continue to speak out the word of love to a world filled with terror, with beauty, with endless possibility.

Faithfully,

Barbara Sophia Del Mastro



Visit The Way Home website:
<http://www.thewayhomeprogram.org/>

Intelligent, talented, glamorous, yet modest, she's a blogger, op-ed columnist, activist, and author of several books and articles. She has an amazing background.

Self-described as a political theorist, author, and full-time passionate writer with 20 years experience in civic engagement, she earned a B.A. *cum laude* in Psychology from Smith College and a PhD in political science from Rutgers University. In between these educational pursuits, she worked with chemically-dependent and emotionally disturbed adolescents in a Sarasota, Florida group home, where she grew up, and as a case manager in Bradenton, Florida.

After graduating from Rutgers, Claire took her first tenure-line position at Illinois State University where she worked for two years. She then moved to George Mason University in Virginia. She served as a faculty member in the Department of Government and Politics in the Department of Public and International Affairs for 12 years, served as the director of the Honors in Government Program, Graduate Programs in Political Science, the Higher Education Program, and as Democracy Project Campus Coordinator.

During this time, while living in Silver Springs, Maryland and Alexandria, Virginia, she summered in Rehoboth Beach and now lives there full time since 2011 with her spouse, Mikki, a software developer.

She has extensive experience working with nonprofits and other action-oriented organizations and lobbying for various causes in Maryland and Delaware. For 20 years, she has been an associate of the Kettering Foundation, an operating foundation rooted in the tradition of cooperative research conducted from the perspective of citizens and that focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities and their nation.

Since spring of 2015, Claire has held the positions of Program Director for Common Cause Delaware (CCDE), one of the state's most effective watchdog group that has played a leading role in the passage of major legislation to strengthen democracy in Delaware. CCDE is part of national Common Cause, a non-partisan organization with 400,000 members.

Claire ran for the Delaware State Senate for the sixth district (Dewey, Rehoboth, Lewes, Milton, Harbeson) in 2014 and chaired the local Democratic committee from 2012 until starting with CCDE.

Claire is a member of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Rehoboth. In her private time, she enjoys cooking, yoga, reading, and socializing with friends.

Since her recent volunteerism with The Way Home, she has set up Twitter and Facebook feeds and is researching other communication tools to get the word out.

At the risk of another cliché, welcome aboard!



Profiles in Courage

Melissa describes her life, until now, as chaotic and herself, until now, as afraid and lonely. An only child, she describes her childhood as coming from a very good family but subject to much abuse around her. "I hid from my mother and a stepfather who abused my mother and I learned to keep it all inside me. Yet, she kept going back to him. Also, I found fault in everyone else."

At six years old, she had open heart surgery and remained in the hospital for several months. "I remember feeling abandoned as I watched my mother from the hospital window when she left. That's when I created, in my mind, abandonment issues. I soon realized when she returned as often as she could in between working full time and housekeeping, that she was the only person there for me."

I don't remember much about my childhood but when my mom married again around the age of 11, he became an awesome father. We called him Big Daddy. Mom and I moved into his house. He was a family man and provided for us. There were no signs of abusing my mother. Everyone that knew him loved him. He drove his truck to deliver turkeys at holidays and drove a yellow Head Start school bus."

In spite of things leveling out, she became rebellious and at age 11 had her first alcoholic drink, first cigarette, and began lashing out and physically fighting with everyone. "I was always mature for my age yet I realize now I was seeking attention, wanted to be liked, and be part of the crowd," she remembers.

At age 13, she became pregnant. "My mom was devastated. The doctors said I was at high risk because of my heart problems and we were told I could die, the child could die, or both could die. It was a devastating decision my mother had to make to choose to abort my baby."

At age 15, she became pregnant again. "My mother was not going to pursue another abortion." At age 16, she had a job in a fast food restaurant, a driver's license, and moved into her own two-bedroom house. A daughter and then a son was born. "From age 15 to age 20, I abused alcohol and my children were placed with my mother. But, even in my addiction, my children always came to me for advice and I always helped them."

"At age 25, in order to keep my boyfriend, I felt I had to join him in using crack cocaine. I called my mom -- that was my way of reaching out to her -- she hung up on me."

Melissa was involved in several relationships, some abusive. She was beaten severely with an iron pipe and her mouth was wired. She left and returned to Florida where she was born. She married an older man who pinned her down and held her at gun point when she wanted to visit her mother. The marriage lasted a week and the court granted an immediate divorce. "I tried to fill a void in becoming involved with these types of men and then I became on a mission to hurt everyone back."

In 2003, she was convicted of manslaughter. "I felt I was defending myself in a fight and stabbed my victim in his leg. Unfortunately, it was a main artery." She was sentenced to 30 years. Twenty years was suspended after 10 years for the weapons charge and 10 years suspended after 4 years for the manslaughter charge. In all, she served 14 years at Baylor's Women's Correctional Institution, Sussex Correctional Institution, and one year in Work Release.

"It was a turning point in my life. Serving time helped me. I participated in mental health counseling, group counseling, AA, and I took time to get things in

perspective. I allowed myself to stop pointing the finger. I worked on anger and stress management, grief, loss, abandonment and self esteem issues. I wanted to work and took several computer courses." From 2007 to 2011, she was the head cook at Baylor.

In 2005, Melissa became a certified trainer in the Alternative to Violence Project and was one of two women chosen to dress up and, escorted by officers, talk to at-risk youth and give a tour of the compound. "We instilled in them that this is not where you want to be," she states emphatically.

While at Baylor, in 2010, the warden established a 'long termers group' where she could voice opinions and offer suggestions. "She listened to our complaints and stated she 'would take them into consideration.' Some things came to fruition. For instance, when we mentioned a need for recreation, she said we could have a vegetable garden. 'Show me what you can do,' she challenged. At first, we were not allowed to have shovels or rakes unless we were supervised. We broke ground with a rock and a stick. We pulled up grass. We grew herbs for the prison culinary class. We grew strawberries, vegetables, and flowers to sell to prison officers. We made compost. We grew rose bushes."

Having quit school in the ninth grade, Melissa graduated from James H. Groves High School at the Sussex Correctional Institution campus. "Before I quit school, I found it difficult to retain information. I felt ashamed but now I believe I was dyslexic. One of the Groves instructors, Charles DeLong, recognized my math difficulties and since I was working as a cook, he suggested I focus on the conversions I had to make in recipes. Suddenly, I could put it all together," she stated triumphantly.

A counselor at SCI suggested she become involved in The Way Home while in Work Release.

"I met Miss Barbara [Del Mastro] and Mr. Tony [Neal] while I was at SCI and while in Work

Release, participated in an inspirational group at Mr. Tony's church, the Booker Street Church of God. I remember he recommended talking to someone when you spiral into 'stinkin' thinkin'. I participated in all-day Way Home Alternative to Violence workshops and Christmas quarterly dinners."

Released two years ago on August 13th, Melissa has made great strides. "It's taken 48 years to realize that I created my world in my mind. My life is balanced. I accept who I was -- chaotic, afraid, and lonely -- but my wounds are healing. I pray for and strive for peace every day. I'll be celebrating my second Christmas in freedom," she smiles happily.

In her transition from prison, she worked as a cook in a Rehoboth fast food restaurant and now works in a local chicken processing plant and attends church and women's groups in the community. "I had different emotions in accepting and appreciating freedom. It took one month to know I could take a shower and cook whenever I wanted to. I listen to spiritual programs and practice being focused. I know every day is not peaches and cream and I know I have to stay motivated. I am mindful of my past and I have to remind myself if I step across that line, I might not come back. I walk to my own happy beat and I know I can always call Miss Barbara or Mr. Tony when I begin to struggle. At the start of my new beginning, I wanted them in my network.

I am rebuilding bridges with my mom, my children, and my family. I can talk with them about the person I was then in my addiction and who I am now."

Melissa was honored as the Participant of the Quarter at the September quarterly dinner. As her last name -- Victory -- implies, she, against all odds, is victorious in creating in two years a wholesome, richly spiritual, positive, and fulfilling lifestyle. She is looking forward to the future, and is achieving success, one day at a time.



Melissa keeps the shirt, titled Str8 (Straight) Talk, she wore in group counseling sessions at Sussex Correctional Institution as a reminder of her road to recovery.



Did You Know?

If you volunteer at All Saints' Thrift Shop in Rehoboth, your name is placed in a hat, routinely one name is chosen, and the recipient can designate a nonprofit where a donation of \$750 will be designated.

(We hope you will choose The Way Home.)

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A News Journal article of October 18, 2015 stated the following:

- 6 out of 10 prisoners in Delaware prison cells are black.
- Over 80 percent of homicide victims in Delaware have been African Americans.
- More than 200 children are behind bars and 76 percent are black.
- African Americans make up 56 percent of inmates, yet only 22 percent of the state's population is black.
- Two-thirds of men in some Wilmington neighborhoods are either in prison or on probation and parole. Children are growing up without fathers and parents are struggling to find decent jobs

- The state currently spends \$277 million on corrections -- \$36,232 per year for each inmate.
- Between 80 and 85 percent of inmates in the prison's adult basic education in Delaware test at or below a ninth grade education level.
- Over 70 percent of men released from Delaware's prisons will return to prison within three years.
- Solving the racial disparities starts with giving people economic and educational opportunities. Research shows a direct correlation between opportunity and success later in life.

Chief Justice of the Delaware Supreme Court, Leo E. Strine, Jr., has created a committee titled "Access to Justice Commission's Committee on Fairness."

Thirty professionals -- prosecutors, public defenders, judges, law enforcement officials, community members and academics -- joined the chief justice to explore how decisions are made about charging, prosecuting and sentencing and any conscious or unconscious racial disparities in the process.

A series of informational hearings and public forums were held throughout the fall in Wilmington and Georgetown where citizens were encouraged to speak.



## **HELP WANTED**

### **The Way Home is always looking for individuals willing to:**

Mentor a participant. Visit someone in prison who receives few visitors. - Help with on-going workshops. Help with transportation. - Help organize a clothing/coat/necessities drive.

Serve on one of the Way Home committees.

Work with your church or civic organization to hold an annual fundraiser or give an annual pledge to The Way Home.

Help with job search/job contacts for The Way Home participants.

Pray for former prisoners and all who live and work in correctional institutions, and the community.

**To Volunteer, call The Way Home Office at (302) 856-9870**

## **Ongoing Support Groups**

**Way Home Women's Group** - 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. every first and third Monday nights at Georgetown Presbyterian Church, North Bedford Street. Call the office to check for cancellations.

**Everlasting Hope** - Wednesday nights, 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., Booker Street Church of God, Georgetown

**Conflict Resolution Workshops** – Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. St Paul’s Episcopal Church, Pine & Academy Streets, Georgetown Lunch & soup & bread supper provided. Call The Way Home office for information and to register: (302) 856-9870.

**Transforming Trauma Workshops** - Led by Charito Calvachi Mateyko, workshops are held throughout the year. For more information, call The Way Home office, at (302) 856-9870.



## **Thank You!**

...to everyone who plays such a vital role in helping The Way Home keep reaching out to those leaving prison!

...and the many individuals who give of their time, talent and treasure!

...churches, synagogues, and other worship centers across the state of Delaware!

...businesses, banks, financial institutions, foundations, clubs, and other nonprofit organizations, county and state, and individual donors and anonymous patrons...

## **Please Know That You Are Truly Appreciated.**



**The Way Home  
P. O. Box 1103  
Georgetown, DE 19947**

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