Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

https://www.vera.org/blog/jump-starting-a-better-future

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

I spent Wednesday at a conference titled On the Front Lines: Building Skills for Re-Entry and Diversion. The culmination of months of preparation by the Discharge Planning Training Institute, a work group of the New York City Discharge Planning Collaboration, it was a response to the demand for ongoing training for frontline workers involved in assisting people re-entering communities from New York City and New York State correctional facilities. I left with important insights into my own work.

We started the day with keynote speaker Stanley Richards, chief operating officer of the Fortune Society, who talked about his personal journey from incarceration to executive management. It was powerful when he told a room of nearly 200 frontline workers, I stand here today because of people like you. People who saw what lay ahead of me, instead of what was on my record. Mr. Richards described how his counselors encouragement to aim higher than what he believed possible eventually shifted to a focus on supporting his own aspirations.

Reflecting on his speech, Im struck by the way that the providers and Mr. Richardss visions fit together to promote success in his life. To get started, he needed someone to see beyond what he had done in the past, to see potential where he saw none. He needed his providers to have a vision for him. But in order to sustain the momentum, he needed to craft his own vision and have providers who could support him in its pursuit.

Mr. Richardss story holds valuable lessons for our client-provider relationships. Clients come to us at points in their lives when they may need us to lend them hope. But as soon as possible, we need to shift the focus to supporting them as they build their own vision of what is possible in their lives.

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