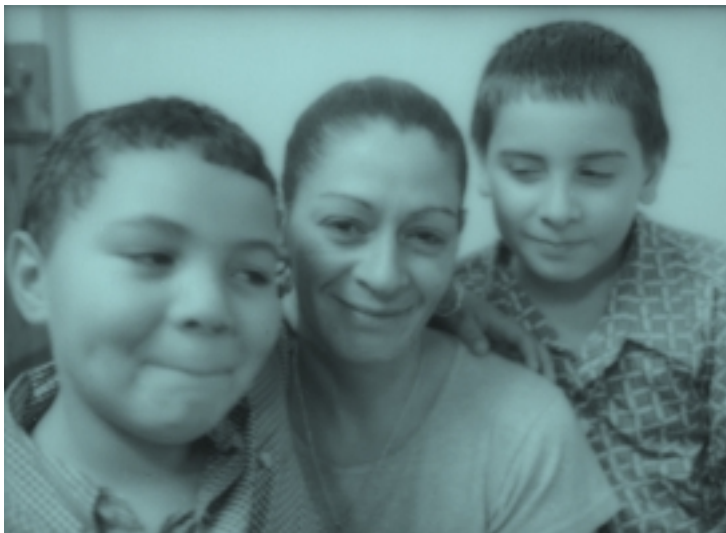


DEVELOPING JUSTICE

in South Brooklyn



A Program Report from Fifth Avenue Committee



Developing Justice

in South Brooklyn



Darryl King, Project Director
Julian Brown, Assistant Director
Eddie Rosario, Case Manager
Kym Clark, Organizer
Amy Levine, Intern

left to right: Kym Clark, Julian Brown,
Darryl King, Eddie Rosario

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in South Brooklyn

A Neighborhood Program
Advances Community Justice

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Foreword

by Senator Velmanette Montgomery



Since the 1970's, New York's criminal justice system has grown significantly in terms of prison construction, the rate of incarceration, and operating expenses. For example, between 1973 and 1999, New York State's prison population grew fivefold from 13,832 to 71,472 – and from 1973 through 2002, the number of correctional facilities expanded from 19 to 70. In addition, correctional services' capital construction costs increased from \$7.8 million in 1973 to \$327 million in 1999.

While the State continues to increase spending on prison building and other correctional services, it has decreased spending on colleges, job training, prison education, and substance abuse treatment programs. Across the United States, the number of people in prison has doubled as we have locked more and more people up for low-level drug offenses. There are more African-American men in prison than in college.

More than 600,000 people nationwide, including 20,000 from New York State, return each year from prison to their communities. Many are undereducated, lacking marketable job skills, and plagued by addiction or mental health problems. Many lose their right to vote, further undermining the strength of their communities.

Fortunately, there are some bright spots on the horizon. The Developing Justice in South Brooklyn program of the Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) is one of these bright spots. Developing Justice in South Brooklyn is pioneering new ways to offer former prisoners meaningful support and services at the neighborhood level. In addition, the program is taking a community-based approach to criminal justice issues, incorporating the participation and input of community members. I believe that this “community justice” approach is critical to achieving meaningful reform of the criminal justice system, in New York and around the country.

During my time in office, I have seen FAC grow from a small group focused on the rehabilitation of a few urban blocks to a thriving hub working for justice throughout South Brooklyn and New York. They host a wide variety of programs, from affordable housing to job training to adult education to tenant organizing. As FAC reaches its 25th anniversary, I am pleased and proud to introduce the following report about its Developing Justice in South Brooklyn program.

This report tells the stories of a few of the thousands of people who return to New York neighborhoods from prison each year. It illuminates trends that FAC and I have been working to reverse. And it suggests ways to build a future in which we shift our energy from funding incarceration to investing in community-based efforts that make our neighborhoods safer and stronger. I hope this report will be read and heeded by all those concerned with this common future.

Sincerely,



Senator Velmanette Montgomery

Velmanette Montgomery has served with distinction in the New York State Senate since 1985. She represents the 18th Senatorial District in Brooklyn, which includes Bedford-Stuyvesant, Boerum Hill, Clinton Hill, Fort Greene, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Park Slope, Red Hook and Sunset Park. She has been a leader on issues including health care, child care, AIDS, and education. As co-chair of the NYS Senate Democratic Task Force on Criminal Justice Reform, she has co-sponsored legislation to repeal the mandatory provisions of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, propose alternatives to incarceration, change the composition and practices of the Parole Board, and stop the capricious and inhumane use of Special Housing Units (SHU's) as a disciplinary tool.



Developing Justice participants joined in Drop the Rock rallies and traveled to Albany to educate legislators about the injustice of the Rockefeller laws and their debilitating effects on communities and families.



Prisoner Reentry in South Brooklyn:

Statistics and Solutions

This year, close to 25,000 people will get off a bus in New York City with big dreams and empty pockets, looking for homes, jobs, medical care, educational opportunities, and all of the other ingredients for a new and better life. Like other arrivals to the city of immigrants, they will be entering a whole new world. But unlike many immigrants, they will not cross a state or international border to get here. Instead, they will be leaving prison.

From 1990 to the end of 2001, the total number of adults incarcerated in U.S. jails or prisons, or under federal, state, or local correctional authority, on probation or parole, grew from 4.35 million to 6.59 million.¹ And since 1998 about 600,000 people have been released from prison each year.² The effects of this dramatic national trend are concentrated in large cities like New York, where the majority of prisoners come from and return to lower-income neighborhoods. In New York State, nearly 80% of state prisoners come from the New York metropolitan area, and most of them return to the city upon release. One study has found that fifty percent of Brooklyn's parolees wind up on city blocks that comprise only eleven percent of all the city blocks of Brooklyn.³

The large numbers of people returning from prison in just a few urban neighborhoods is one visible manifestation of a criminal justice policy that has had disproportionate effects on low-income African-American and Latino communities. While felony crime rates have decreased in New York City in recent years, rates of arrest and incarceration have continued to rise. This disparity reflects the fact that prisoners convicted of non-violent, usually drug-related offenses now represent 62.5% of all of New York State's prisoners.⁴ In Brooklyn, while the arrest rate in Brooklyn for felonies went from 42,928 to 33,229 between 1990 and 2000 – a decline of 22.6% – the arrest rate for drug-related, non-violent misdemeanors increased 243%, from 9,208 to 31,609. Felony convictions went down 55%, while misdemeanor convictions increased 45%.⁵

94% of New York's incarcerated drug offenders are African-Americans and

The Developing Justice program is working to change stereotypes and put faces on the men and women who spend time in jails and prisons. Terms such as "ex-offender" and "ex-prisoner" are dehumanizing and reductive. We are trying to convey the realities of our participants' lives: that they are parents and children and neighbors and employees and tenants like any other New York City residents. As a result we have tried to limit the use of dehumanizing language in this report as much as possible, within the bounds of brevity and readability.

Latinos from the state's poorest communities, despite the fact that studies consistently show that drug use is evenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups.⁶ Inside prisons, drugs are easily available and drug use rampant, so that prisoners often re-enter society with drug problems. Among the estimated 1.4 million adults across the country on parole or other supervised release during 2001, 20.8% were illicit drug users (in contrast to 6.5% of adults not on parole).⁷ New York State has the highest number of prisoners infected with HIV of all other prison systems in the country, including the largest number of HIV-positive inmates.⁸ When drug users who are HIV positive are released back to the street, they become part of what should be considered a community public health issue. Since treatment is hard to come by, however, it is likely that they will again become incarcerated, becoming once again a criminal justice statistic.

Contrary to popular opinion, higher incarceration rates do not necessarily improve a neighborhood. A recent study finds that the forced migration of a neighborhood's adults to prison may actually threaten that neighborhood's stability, rather than increasing its safety.⁹ People making the move into prison are leaving their lives as heads of household, breadwinners, fathers, sons, brothers, mothers, daughters, caregivers, employers and employees, landlords and tenants.

94% of New York's incarcerated drug offenders are African-Americans and Latinos from the state's poorest communities, despite the fact that studies consistently show that drug use is evenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups.

Their disappearance from the neighborhood may disrupt social networks, destroy economic infrastructure, and rupture families, weakening those institutions that preserve social order. In other words, this study suggests that the more exposure a neighborhood has to the prison system, the less likely it is to be able to protect itself from crime in the future.

The lack of investment in educational opportunities for these poor communities has been compared to the growth of New York's prisons, and the resulting statistics are mind-numbing. Since fiscal year 1988, state support for New York's public universities has decreased by 29% while funding for prisons has increased by 76%. In actual dollars, there has been a nearly equal trade-off, with the Department of Correctional Services receiving a \$761 million increase during that time while state funding for New York's city and state university systems has declined by \$615 million. There are more African-Americans and Hispanics incarcerated than there are attending state universities. Since 1989, there have been

more African Americans entering the prison system for drug offenses each year than there were graduating from SUNY with undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees combined.¹⁰

Urban communities are not blind to the devastation caused by the inequities of the criminal justice system, and they are responding by educating the public and offering new initiatives for reform. The public is also responding. A recent study published by the Open Society Institute shows how criminal justice policies that continue to favor incarceration over prevention and rehabilitation have lost the support of the American public:

Among the various approaches to dealing with crime, Americans express a clear preference for prevention as the best strategy. Indeed, thirty-seven percent believe that prevention should be the highest priority, ahead of punishment (20%), enforcement (19%) and rehabilitation (17%). In combination, prevention and rehabilitation (54%) garner far more support than do the approaches of punishment and enforcement (39%). Significantly, the pre- and post-9/11 results to this question are virtually identical. Additionally, 76% believe that the country currently puts too little emphasis on prevention (just 3% say we focus too heavily on prevention).¹¹

When men and women return home after serving time, they return to communities fragmented by poverty, widespread unemployment, poor public schools, and the lack of safe, affordable housing. In most cases, they have little to give them a stake in the community. They arrive home with a patchwork of needs: housing, medical care, training, jobs, legal identity, family and personal relationships, and mental and emotional stability. If they succeed in the struggle to attain a relatively productive and fulfilling life, they do so by straining all of the resources of their families and of the community, at least in the short term. In many cases, they fail and return to prison (in New York State the recidivism rate is 40%.¹²) From the point of view of a prisoner's family and community, the release from prison may be as stressful as the original crime and its immediate consequences.

The Role of CDCs

In many urban neighborhoods, there are organizations that have the capacity and the incentive to put all of these statistics into a locally relevant framework, and to bring together the ideas and desires of the public with the needs and structures of the criminal justice system. Community organizations are strategically positioned to be a base for prisoner reintegration, as they have direct channels to families of people in prison, community residents, community leaders, local social service agencies, and community employers. A recent anti-recidivism initiative from the U.S. Department of Justice recognizes that "communities know and trust these types of programs, which will enhance the community's acceptance of them in the reentry program....Community-based organizations that include faith-based groups can provide a wide variety of services including mentoring, tutoring, and



Project Director Darryl King

counseling both within the community and within correctional settings.”¹³

Community development corporations (CDCs) are one type of community organization that could be well-suited to this important task. CDCs are not-for-profits that channel public and private resources into improving infrastructure and opportunities for local residents. They are led by neighborhood residents, who usually comprise the majority of board and staff, and they work to solve local problems and build on the community’s assets, especially through affordable housing and community economic development. Many, like the Fifth Avenue Committee, began by organizing residents to rescue abandoned properties and create affordable

housing and homeownership opportunities. Over time, FAC has created workforce development programs and expanded our organizing to include welfare recipients as well as tenants.

Historically, CDCs have invested in the strengths of their communities and fought against institutionalized racism and other systems of social and economic injustice that restrict opportunities. The criminal justice system, which has evolved in the past thirty years away from rehabilitation toward enforcement and surveillance, has become such a system of injustice. In the same way that a toxic chemical plant in a neighborhood causes physical, social, and economic disorders, the prison system sucks the vitality and positive growth out of the low-income African-American and Latino communities most affected by it.

Community development corporations are expert in bringing together neighborhood residents, public agencies, and business leaders to solve neighborhood problems. In the context of criminal justice, CDCs generally have focused on “prevention” issues, such as programs for at-risk kids and strategies to improve public safety through collaboration with local police. But very few CDCs have addressed the ways in which the prison system itself harms their communities. CDCs can offer alternatives-to-incarceration programs that promote rehabilitation and community service, help strengthen families affected by incarceration, and work with young people to keep them from getting involved with the criminal justice system in the first place.

With so many individuals returning from prisons to their neighborhoods, CDCs must find creative ways to overcome the obstacles that former prisoners face upon re-entry to the community. For example, CDCs can begin to work with parole officers to augment the traditional system of supervision by offering a more comprehensive system of support in which ex-prisoners can work with community organizations toward personal goals of work and productive citizenship.

The Developing Justice Program

Developing Justice in South Brooklyn is a program designed and staffed by formerly incarcerated individuals, and sponsored by the Fifth Avenue Committee. The Fifth Avenue Committee’s experience with housing, workforce development, community organizing, and fundraising made it possible to design a program with built-in networks of opportunity and support.

Developing Justice was formed in 2000 with two practical purposes: to help people recently released from prison locate opportunities for housing, jobs, and education, and to provide a forum for community discussion and activism around criminal justice issues. For every individual transformed by the experience of going to and leaving prison, there is a family and a neighborhood that also has been transformed. Developing Justice is led by community leaders who understand exactly how the criminal justice system affects the daily lives of local families and institutions. We believe that resources for rehabilitation and reintegration need to be invested on a community level, in order to counteract the toxic effects of a criminal justice system that targets certain populations and neighborhoods far

more than others.

We have a total of 117 people in our program, 99 men and 18 women. 57 are African-American, 57 Latino, and three are Caucasian.

In general, most program participants have not completed high school or its equivalent and were not working full-time when arrested. Since their release from prison, they live with relatives and have responsibility for children. Nearly all are seeking full-time employment above the minimum wage. Their ages range from 18 to 58.

As of November 2002:

- we have reserved four units of transitional housing for program participants in FAC-constructed transitional housing, and have placed other program participants into permanent housing;
- we have helped 31 participants secure employment, and seven more complete skills training in network cable installation or commercial driving;
- we have helped 9 individuals reunite with family members, and we have provided assistance to family members of ten participants;
- we have joined with many other organizations around the state to fight for repeal of the Rockefeller drug laws, which mandate long sentences for minor and first-time offenses;
- we have worked with legislators to draft bills that would reinvest state funds in community initiatives;
- we have hosted community forums and rallies to educate our neighbors about the criminal justice system, and to demand that our local politicians take a stand on criminal justice issues;
- we have convened regular meetings of a “Prison Families Community Forum” where family members of people in prison come to share ideas and develop plans to organize for change in the criminal justice system;
- we have launched Project R.E.A.L., a leadership development course for program participants, to help them take leadership roles in the community and direct efforts toward social change.

In two years, Developing Justice has laid a solid foundation for a comprehensive prisoner re-entry program that not only helps individuals to locate resources and opportunities but also helps the community to build a better understanding of criminal justice issues. This report outlines the different facets of the program, and tells the stories of some of its participants. We hope that it will suggest a model for other urban neighborhoods to address criminal justice issues from a community perspective.



Julian Brown: Making it R.E.A.L.

The daily lives of Developing Justice participants are mostly concerned with locating the tools for survival – job, housing, training, drug treatment, medical care – within the boundaries of curfew and programs mandated by parole. When these problems have been solved or managed, there is still the ongoing stress of coping with the past and reunifying with fragmented families. It seems unlikely that re-entering prisoners could fit policy reform and community activism into such complicated lives, and yet many of them do. As the profiles in this report demonstrate, the participants keep coming back after they've found their job or their training program.

Julian Brown is one of the reasons they come back. After serving four and a half years inside for drug-related offenses, he went into a work-release program and eventually was able to secure a job as a community service supervisor at Midtown Community Court. There he found out about the Developing Justice program and applied for the Assistant Director position.

Julian started working at Developing Justice when he lived in Hell's Kitchen, and now he travels to the program from Harlem. His knowledge of the city has given him added insight into the design and further evolution of the Developing Justice program.

"Right now a lot of our participants are not strictly local, but the fact that they're willing to travel to Park Slope from Coney Island or the Bronx shows that every neighborhood needs a program like this." Eventually, ideally, there will be programs like Developing Justice in every neighborhood that has a substantial population of re-entering prisoners.

In the meantime, Julian is concerned with building a program that tackles issues of personal development and self-actualization in addition to solving practical problems. In collaboration with Brian Colon at CASES, Julian has designed the curriculum for Project R.E.A.L. (Re-emergence of Ex-Prisoners toward Action and Leadership), a three month leadership development program in which participants meet twice a week.

During the first module program participants focus on identifying what leadership is, and how it affects personal development. For the second module they analyze criminal justice policies, such as the war on drugs and why, in certain communities, crime has been more criminalized. In the final sessions they think about social change and how to organize and take action to achieve it. After going through the program, participants are invited to come back and facilitate the next three-month session.

Project R.E.A.L. stresses the positive uses of every participant's experience. "Ex-prisoners have knowledge and experience; we all have the ability to teach as well as learn. Some individuals may have more formal education on a topic; others may have more life experience related to the topic; some may be unaware of the knowledge they possess; but each person has a valuable contribution to make. Developing Justice means taking the knowledge and power each participant brings to the table and working together to see things more clearly and act more effectively."

Participant Profile: Kevin Anderson

Kevin Anderson had been out of prison for about a year when he saw Julian Brown, assistant director of Developing Justice, walking on Bergen Street in Park Slope. Kevin, who grew up in the Gowanus Projects, knew Julian from the Midtown Manhattan Community Court, so he was happily surprised to see him in his neighborhood. "It was a blessing to run into Julian," Kevin says. "He's going places, and I want to go places, too. I didn't want to go back to prison." Julian was delighted to see Kevin, too, and he quickly signed his friend up for Developing Justice.

Since joining the program in May 2001, Kevin has been a busy man. He works full-time for FAC's partner Community Access at 551 Warren Street, he's studying to become a drug counselor and he tries to be a good father to his sons, ages 18 and 19. "They're good boys," he says. "That's why I've got to keep this going, for them." His sons both live in the neighborhood.

Although he went to prison for armed robbery, his real problem was drug addiction, Kevin says. "I tried to get the help I needed from counselors and treatment programs. Instead I did a hard six years in jail. Jail didn't do me any good, it only did me harm."

One key to the Developing Justice program's success, Kevin says, is that many of its staff members have served time in prison. "You have people who have been in the same predicament, eaten the same type of food, gone through the same degrading treatment day and night. You learn from that. Their lives have been changed over because they wanted to make a difference. That's the whole thing, wanting to make a difference."

Julian is a role model for him, and so is program director Darryl King. "There must be only a handful of people who served that much time and came out and accomplished so much," Kevin says. "It's the old cliché. If he can do it, I can do it." The program's focus on leadership development and training has inspired Kevin to become active, including traveling to Albany in March for Drop the Rock Day to support repeal of the Rockefeller Drug Laws. "After going through all that I went through," he says, "I am more than happy to partake in some events to get them repealed."

He also looks forward to becoming a drug counselor. "I want to afford people the opportunities where they won't go back out onto the streets" he says. "I want to help them keep from falling back into the same plague I was in. I was given a chance, so now I want to be able to give back."



Developing Justice means taking the knowledge and power each participant brings to the table and working together to see things more clearly and act more effectively.



Developing Justice in South Brooklyn:

From Theory to Practice

As a community organization, the Fifth Avenue Committee has always placed community education and organizing high on its list of priorities. That's why in 1998, at the request of then FAC Senior Property Manager Darryl King, the Criminal Justice Working Group was founded. The purpose of the working group was to talk about how criminal justice issues were affecting our neighborhood, and how FAC might find a way to address them.

A major impetus for the group's formation came from Darryl King and Brian Colon, both former-prisoners who used FAC resources to rebuild their lives. Another important contributor at the beginning was Edwin Alicea, then FAC's job developer, who had logged in a surprisingly high number of ex-prisoners looking for jobs. His traditional methods of matching jobseeker to employer were not working with this group. Clearly men and women leaving prison had special needs that required a new approach.

The Criminal Justice Working Group developed a concept paper that examined the different ways in which community organizations like FAC might tackle the prisoner reentry phenomenon, using existing workforce development, organizing, and housing resources. When the Annie E. Casey Foundation came on board as a seed funder, the Developing Justice program was born. More funding came soon after from the Open Society Institute and the Public Welfare Foundation, and later from the JEHT Foundation.

FAC board member Pat Conway, who helped found FAC in the 1970's and has lived in the neighborhood for many years, was one of the initial supporters of the program. "Two things came together, Darryl's determination and the realization that we all knew people in the neighborhood who had had run-ins with the system and then had trouble finding resources to make their way. From the beginning we knew that we wanted to concentrate on adult ex-prisoners, as opposed to at-risk youth or any other criminal justice issue. We knew we had to establish a focus and stick to it in order to be successful. We were very fortunate in having

fundress with so much knowledge about criminal justice – they were more experienced than we were.”

Working initially with Mishi Faruqee, and then with Assistant Director Julian Brown and Case Manager Eddie Rosario, King and FAC developed a program model for reaching out to and working with former prisoners returning to the community. The program launched in the fall of 2000 and quickly attracted both men and women, some just out of prison and some who had been out for a year or two or even more. Enrollment is voluntary, and participants find out about the program through word of mouth, flyers, or referrals from other post-release programs.

One key element of the program is that all three of its staff members were themselves incarcerated. In addition to being living proof of how former-prisoners can turn their lives around, they are able to relate to the participants on the level of shared personal experience.

As the brochure explains, the program involves “not only giving individuals a chance to change their lives but also transforming our community for the better – by advancing racial, social and economic equality and enhancing opportunities for all members of our community to succeed.” Participants who only want help with their personal needs are encouraged to think more broadly about the importance of “giving back.” Once involved, the former prisoners are the project’s driving force and have a central role in shaping its focus and activities.

When they enroll, participants work with Case Manager Eddie Rosario to set their own personal goals in up to nine areas: employment, education, housing, obtaining temporary assistance and documents, family relationships, substance abuse, health/mental health, avoiding recidivism, and leadership development. They list these goals in order of priority, and work with staff to determine what steps need to be taken to achieve them. Participants are encouraged to remain a part of the program even if they have achieved their goals, and many do so. They continue to attend meetings, work on policy issues, talk with newer participants, and visit high schools and youth detention centers to pass on their experience of the criminal justice system.

A critical component of the program is the peer group meeting, a monthly opportunity for participants and staff to share perspectives on life after prison. At these meetings those newer participants who are still feeling their way in the world outside of prison draw support and wisdom from Developing Justice staff and participants who have been successful in finding employment, housing, and fulfilling family lives. The peer group meetings are also opportunities to discuss policy issues and their ramifications for Developing Justice participants and the rest of the FAC community.

During the first two years, the major policy issue at Developing Justice was the effort to repeal the Rockefeller drug laws, a campaign known as “Drop the Rock.” Other issues under discussion are new prison construction, the outlandish cost of prison phone service, public housing policies that exclude ex-prisoners, and “jus-

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Darryl King: Role Model and Mentor



Darryl King joined the staff of the Fifth Avenue Committee through a work-release program after serving twenty-five years in the state prison system for a crime he did not commit. Throughout his time in prison he fought to establish his innocence, but in spite of the support of prominent lawyers and journalists for his case, and public exposure such as a story on NBC's Dateline, Darryl's appeals were rejected.

At FAC, Darryl was responsible for maintaining all of FAC's properties. He took courses in property management at NYU, but he saw from the start that the job was really about people. "I knew that being there, whether it was at 3 in the morning or 9 at night, was the most important thing. And I was always there. I figured the only way a difference could be made was if we made it. We're all like that at FAC. It's the chemistry of caring together with the passion for educating that make the programs work."

It was in his role as property manager that Darryl attended a conference with property managers from not-for-profit, community development corporations all over the country. One evening as they were winding down after a day of meetings and discussions, the managers began swapping stories about how they had succeeded in getting ex-prisoners out of their buildings. Darryl held his tongue but the next day he went to the conference organizers and asked if he could make a brief presentation at the final session. He spoke to the group about his own experiences, and pointed out the superficiality of their judgments about people who had been incarcerated. The other property managers, impressed, gave Darryl credit for shattering years of stereotypes in one afternoon.

By the time he got back to Brooklyn, Darryl was inspired to start something, and he put together the Criminal Justice Working Group. The mission of the Working Group was to discuss issues of criminal justice facing the community and explore ways to take community action. They settled on prisoner reentry as an area where FAC could make a difference. With early support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, that working group evolved into the Developing Justice program.

As Program Director, Darryl is an inspiring role model and mentor for the Developing Justice participants, many of whom come to FAC because they heard about Darryl while in prison. He has focused on building relationships with corrections and parole officials, politicians, and community leaders, and setting the stage for a national dialogue about community approaches to criminal justice issues.

"You've got to narrow down the problem to where it really is. It's on the local level that we can really make changes. But I want Developing Justice to be the instigator in making it happen in other parts of the country too."

Darryl's strong connections with local and state law enforcement agencies have helped to create an environment for change, and he has a clear vision of how the program can work once it has secured enough funding and support from state agencies. He sees a three-pronged approach to recruitment: 1) finding people who have been released from prison or detention recently, and helping them to get identification, housing, and jobs; 2) contacting people currently in prison and helping them

with a reentry plan, or in some cases helping them to get transferred to the most appropriate facility for them, and finding them pre-release education and training programs; and 3) working with offenders who have just been convicted, helping them to establish plans for reentry before they go inside. This last approach would require the cooperation of the Department of Corrections and of judges, who would give shorter sentences when there was a coherent reentry plan that included education, job training, housing, and health care.

Darryl recently was honored with a Samuel and May Rudin Community Service Award from the New York University Wagner School of Public Service for his commitment to improving opportunities for ex-prisoners and for working resolutely to improve the criminal justice system.

For more information about Darryl's case, go to www.innocentprisoner.org.

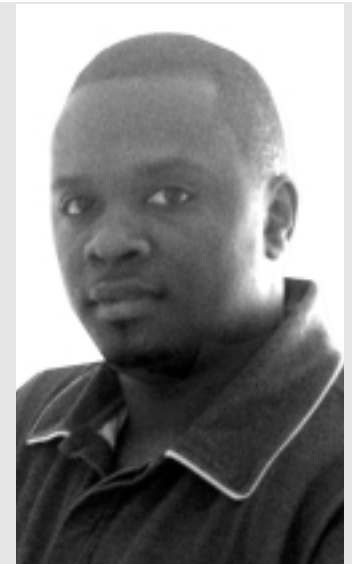
Participant Profile: **Hulen Ginn**

Hulen went to prison at the age of nineteen. When he came out eleven years later, he had no experience of anything except how to survive in prison. As he says, "I made the transition to manhood behind bars."

Hulen was determined to make something of himself after his release, and he took full advantage of the resources offered by the Fifth Avenue Committee. Referred by board member Brian Colon, he went to talk with Darryl King when King was just launching the Developing Justice program. At the time of his release, Hulen had moved into his mother's house, but Darryl King and the rest of the Developing Justice staff felt it was important for him to make a clean break with his past. FAC had reserved a couple of studio units at its brand new supportive housing project for Developing Justice participants. Hulen became one of 551 Warren Street's first residents, and while he was there he met his fiancée, another FAC tenant.

A year and a half later, Hulen has graduated from Mercy College with honors in psychology, and is employed by one of the most prestigious law firms in New York City (a job he found initially through FAC's temp agency, FirstSource Staffing). He's moved in to an apartment in Park Slope with his fiancée and their young child. He volunteers as a mentor for CASES (Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services) and is working with Brian Colon on setting up speaking engagements at schools and group homes. And he regularly attends meetings at Developing Justice, where he serves as a role model and mentor for new participants.

"I learn something new each time I come to the program. And I want to give something back, because FAC has helped me so much. You always hear about the negative plights, the recidivism, and never about the good that some ex-offenders are doing in society. I want to be an agent of good."



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tice reinvestment” – reducing the amount the state spends on incarceration, and using the savings to fund community programs in high-incarceration neighborhoods.

The program’s mission of community involvement and helping others is extremely important to many of the participants. It offers a framework for thinking about their lives beyond their basic needs of jobs, housing, or health care. Perhaps most importantly, it offers reasons to want to stay out of prison, and to keep coming back to FAC for peer support and friendship even after basic personal goals have been met.

Other projects that have sprung from the program include Project R.E.A.L., a program that trains participants in leadership skills and community activism, and an entrepreneurial project through which teams of participants are devising business and marketing plans for community-based enterprises that provide employment for ex-prisoners. The Criminal Justice Working Group, chaired by Brian

FAC’s perspective on criminal justice stems from own roots in the neighborhood, and as a result we have always been keenly aware of prison’s impact on those who stay behind.

Colon, also continues to be a critical forum for discussion and brainstorming about Developing Justice and its ongoing initiatives. The group meets quarterly, bringing together FAC board members with Developing Justice staff and other interested community residents.

Community and Family

FAC’s perspective on criminal justice stems from our roots in the neighborhood, and as a result we have always been keenly aware of prison’s impact on those who stay behind. Our work with families is done primarily through two different approaches. First of all, we work with local residents who have family members in prison. For example, a mother of a prisoner approached the program well before his release with concerns about his future once back in the neighborhood. Developing Justice corresponded with the prisoner about his hopes and dreams, and with the parole board to ensure that when he came out he was immediately plugged in to the program. He now is working and participating in Project R.E.A.L., the leader-

ship development program.

The second approach is to organize the families who take the bus to upstate prisons each week from different locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Organizers Kym Clark and interns Kassia Arbabi and Amy Levine have recruited a group of women with loved ones in prison who meet once a week to provide support and advice for one another, and to think about ways that the system could be made better. As Kym Clark notes, “the prison experience reverberates to all different levels of a family. Some people react more emotionally, some are upset at losing a breadwinner, and others are afraid that an elderly or sick prisoner may be close to dying.” The goal of this forum is for members to lead community campaigns toward changes in the criminal justice system. For example, they are putting pressure on the NYS Department of Corrections to force MCI to ease its high-priced monopoly on phone rates in and out of prisons.

The Challenge of Housing

One of FAC’s most exciting challenges during the planning of Developing Justice was to think of ways that we might match our twenty years of experience creating and managing affordable housing with the overwhelming need for housing among ex-prisoners. When a city-owned property on Pacific Street became available, we began to plan a use for it as transitional housing. As always with FAC projects, as we were thinking about different ways to develop the building we also were knocking on doors in the neighborhood and planning meetings with community members to hear their ideas and get their feedback.

Transitional housing for specific groups almost always faces substantial neighborhood opposition. There are many reasons for this, one of which is simply “not in my backyard.” But for the Pacific Street project, the opposition was a little bit more complicated. This particular block had only recently recovered from years of blight, when it was dangerously overrun by prostitutes and drug users. Some homeowners felt that they had worked hard to clean up their neighborhood, that their neighborhood had been too often chosen as the site of special needs projects, and that they didn’t want to have a constantly changing stream of ex-prisoners on their block. Other homeowners felt that the need for this housing outweighed the objections against it, and knew FAC’s track record well enough to trust the project.

The issue was debated at public meetings and then went to the Community Board for discussion. FAC offered to involve community members in the screening process, and to close the project after a year if the community advisory board recommended it. The Community Board passed the project 21-13.

Although FAC won official approval, the project was scrapped due to problems with funding. With a more complete understanding of the attitudes of our neighbors, we continue to explore possible ways to provide transitional housing for recently released prisoners. We are considering a “scattered-site” model, that would

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Kym Clark: The Prison Families Community Forum

At the corner of Flatbush and DeKalb in downtown Brooklyn in the middle of the night, a large group of mostly women is milling about on the street corner, some talking with others, some standing alone, some holding the hands of children. They are waiting for a bus to take them upstate to one of the state prisons, where they will wait outside, sometimes for hours, before seeing their loved ones.

For almost every one of the New York City residents incarcerated each year, there is a web of relations with broken strands. One of every 14 African-American children has a parent in state or federal prison. Incarcerated males are fathers to 1.2 million children. The majority of state prisoners are held in facilities more than 100 miles from their homes. Some families spend all their money preparing for their weekly or monthly trip upstate in the bus.

FAC organizer Kym Clark and interns Kassia Arbabi and Amy Levine have been visiting the departure points in Manhattan and Brooklyn and talking with the people waiting there since early 2002. In May of 2002 the Prison Families Community Forum, a group that meets one evening a week to discuss the direct personal impacts of the prison industry on its participants, was officially launched.

PFCF is a hybrid, part support group and part action network. One purpose of the group is to provide a friendly space for the airing of grievances and fears, so that the participants can help one another with specific problems, both practical and emotional, that arise around the prison visits. At the same time the group is working toward organizing campaigns to address issues that affect their families, such as exorbitant long distance charges for calls coming out of prison, spotty bus service, and insufficient medical care in the prisons.

"The goal is to get people to mobilize themselves both individually and collectively," explains Kym, a community activist and aspiring filmmaker who herself has a family member behind bars. "Most of the people who come to the meetings have been feeling powerless in the face of the prison system, and this is an opportunity to address injustice in a positive way. Already the participants have taken over the recruiting of new forum members."

At this point the group is primarily women from Brooklyn, who range in age from 20 to 70. The greatest challenge for the group has been to maintain a core of leaders through the constant upheavals and turbulence in the members' lives. Over time, however, members are finding ways to stay connected to the group even when they cannot attend meetings, and the group is evolving into a well-networked community of families that share grievances and triumphs as well as their commitment to reforming the criminal justice system.

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reserve units in existing FAC housing for ex-prisoners, and we are taking part in citywide conversations with supportive housing providers.

Finding a Job

Improving employment opportunities for local residents has always been a strong element of FAC's mission, and our work providing job training and preparation, as well as our relationship-building with employers, has paid off for the Developing Justice program. Over the last decade, FAC has implemented several economic development initiatives that provide jobs and job training through its economic development arm, Brooklyn Workforce Innovations. Currently these initiatives include a temp agency, FirstSource Staffing; a commercial drivers training program, Red Hook on the Road; and Brooklyn Networks, a cable installation training program. Several Developing Justice participants have found work through these programs.

However, a temp job does not always lead to permanent employment, and completion of training does not guarantee job placement. Some employers continue to be reluctant to hire people with prison backgrounds, and with the economic downturn, higher unemployment rates, and more low-skilled workers coming off the welfare rolls, the job prospects for ex-prisoners have grown more limited. Julian Brown and Eddie Rosario are working with Brooklyn Workforce Innovations' Aaron Shiffman to develop employment and job placement strategies for program participants, potentially including a for-profit venture (a silk-screen business, document storage, or recycling) and an initiative that will concentrate on developing positive relationships with local business and political leaders.



Members of Developing Justice's Entrepreneurial Working Group learn about setting up a silk-screening business



Eddie Rosario: Change Yourself, then Change the World

The return from prison is a rigorous psychological journey as well as a move from place to place. When the participants arrive back home, they are nowhere near the end of that psychological journey. They may be motivated to start working and making money, but feel reluctant to go through the often humbling process of job searches and interviews. They may be glad to be out of prison, but have difficulty re-connecting with family and old friends, and feel alienated, lonely, and confused.

A recent study of the “First Month Out” by the Vera Institute found that “while the time after release is fraught with problems, it also offers an opportunity to capitalize on most people’s strong desire to turn their lives around.”¹⁴ This is the opportunity that Eddie Rosario looks for. As Developing Justice’s case manager, Eddie does a lot of counseling. He is the person that most participants meet first, and he says it is critical to start out on the right note. “Most people come in with job needs, saying ‘I heard you guys can get me a job.’ Right at the beginning I give them a clear idea of what Developing Justice is all about – that it’s linking them to resources, but that it also has a larger mission of fighting stereotypes and creating a dialogue between ex-prisoners and the community. I tell them that the world won’t stop for them just because they want to change. They need to demonstrate to the community that they want to change by getting involved in and taking action for the community.”

Each participant works with Eddie to make plans for achieving specific goals. He asks them how they’d like to see their lives in a month, in six months, in five years. If their first priority is to find a job, he works with them on resumes and interviewing techniques, discussing with them how to deal with the big gaps in their personal histories. He helps them think about all of the factors that influence an employer’s response, including dress and attitude.

Eddie notes that everyone comes in ready to change, but they’re all at different stages. He rates each participant on his own complicated scale, weighing in education, job skills, behavior, motivation, factors such as drug use, a bad housing situation, etc. Then he styles his intervention for their individual needs. Some people are ready to go, and just need to be pointed in the right direction. Others are starting from scratch.

Once the intake process is complete, participants begin to get involved in the peer group meetings and in other aspects of the programs such as the recently launched “Project R.E.A.L.” leadership development initiative and the Entrepreneurial Working Group. The individuals in these groups are working toward the larger mission of Developing Justice, by engaging in dialogue with the community, becoming a positive force for change in the community, and working to reform the criminal justice system. Many participants also travel with Eddie and Brian Colon to speak at schools and youth detention centers all over the city, where they explain to at-risk youth why it is neither hip nor inevitable to go to prison.

Eddie says that his public speaking has been a way for him to work through his own past experiences as a drug addict and a prisoner, and to understand how, as

he says, “we’re all doing time and it’s part of the human condition to break out of it. I was free on the street but I never did anything or went anywhere unless it was related to getting drugs. I was a prisoner of my own addiction.”

“At first it was hard for me to admit this because I also knew that inequalities in the criminal justice system made it statistically probable that I would end up in prison at some point. But we have to understand that there are choices we can make, even though we may have fewer choices available to us than someone living in Scarsdale. I don’t mean to ignore the bigger picture, but if you can transform yourself, and take control of your own life, then changing the world comes after.”

Participant Profile: **Fernanda Jusino**

Fernanda Jusino has become one of FAC’s leading activists in the area of criminal justice reform. She works at an agency in Brooklyn that helps public assistance recipients prepare resumes and apply for jobs. A legal secretary before she was incarcerated, Fernanda has desirable job skills and a bright and winning manner that can only facilitate her career goals. She also has a great deal of family support from her husband and her three daughters, with whom she shares an apartment in a FAC-owned building.

But the transition from prison was not easy for Fernanda. “When Fernanda first came to us,” program director Darryl King remembers, “She came in tears.” She had been living with her husband in North Carolina when she was arrested and sent to prison in Virginia on drug charges. They decided that they should move back to Brooklyn when she was released, and her first challenge was to find a home for herself and her family.

Affordable housing for a family with three children is very hard to come by these days, but once she found FAC she was able to apply for the Emergency Housing Program, which found her an apartment. Now settled into a stable living situation, Fernanda suffers from personal health problems that periodically make it difficult for her to work. And she continues to have difficulty coming to terms with the fact that she was away from her young daughters when they were growing up.

For Fernanda, who lives in a FAC-owned building just down the street from the Developing Justice offices, the knowledge that her “guiding angels” are always there to offer emotional support has been critical to her survival. “I don’t know where I’d be without Darryl King and this program. I wouldn’t have my family together, for one thing.” She regularly comes to events and meetings at FAC, to express her own frustrations, to listen to other people, and to think collectively about solutions.

The benefits and services of Developing Justice go far beyond the practical issues of finding housing and employment. People who have been incarcerated experience enormous amounts of stress, guilt, and despondency, both from their internal conflicts about their past behavior and from external forces that continually make them feel stigmatized. Having someone to talk to – especially someone who also has spent time in prison – makes it easier to transform negative emotions into positive steps toward a new life.





Working Toward Community Justice

As Developing Justice continues to work with neighborhood organizations and leaders to improve opportunities for program participants in our own catchment area of Gowanus, Sunset Park, Red Hook, and lower Park Slope, we also are pursuing goals on the citywide, state, and national levels. Across Brooklyn, we are reaching out to other neighborhoods to consider making Brooklyn into a laboratory for experimentation with new forms of reentry and community support for recently released prisoners. On the state level, we continue to press for reform of the Rockefeller drug laws, and toward legislative enactment of a fund that would invest in community-based programs in low-income communities throughout New York State. And on the national level, we are working toward a network of community organizations devoted to exploring new strategies for community justice.

“Community justice” refers to new approaches to crime prevention, public safety, supervision of ex-prisoners, and victim reparation, involving partnerships between community organizations and law enforcement agencies. These approaches have the potential to be more effective than traditional law enforcement solutions in maintaining public safety and reducing the devastating effects of crime and incarceration upon neighborhoods. In the process they save money for the correctional system, build community resources, and work with all elements of the neighborhood rather than focusing only on criminals or on victims.¹⁵

For example, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, located in a refurbished school building in the poverty-stricken neighborhood of Red Hook, is the area hub for “doing justice.” One judge determines sentencing for a variety of low-level criminal cases as well as civil and family court cases. Most sentences involve community restitution of some kind, such as painting over graffiti or cleaning the Justice Center. The judge also mandates drug treatment, dispute mediation, and job training. Many different community organizations partner with the Justice Center and participate in its programming. For example, individuals can be

assigned to meet with a FAC job developer as an alternative sentence.

FAC's Developing Justice program adds an important new dimension to community justice, as it is conceived of and governed by a community-based organization. Most community justice programs have been created and are administered by departments of corrections or large criminal justice agencies. Developing Justice was created by community residents concerned about the effects of the justice system on their community, and, as part of the Fifth Avenue Committee, it is governed by local leaders. As a result, it can give voice to the community's perspective and begin to shatter the prevailing myth that people in low-income communities want "tough on crime" strategies.¹⁶ Community justice programs with local leadership can help create alternatives to the current system – alternatives focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and community-building – that truly make low-income neighborhoods stronger.

Another potential role for community justice programs is to complement or even replace the traditional system of parole. Parole used to mean a combination of support and supervision. Now it mostly means just supervision, or surveillance. Most parolees meet with their parole officers, who have ever-increasing caseloads, for about fifteen minutes once or twice a month (often after waiting for hours for their appointment). They take urine tests and tell the officer where they've been

Community justice programs with local leadership can help create alternatives to the current system – alternatives focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and community-building – that truly make low-income neighborhoods stronger.

and what they've been doing. They may negotiate with the parole officer, for example to try and get a more liberal curfew, or to be able to move away from a bad domestic situation, and often they try to get the parole officer's help with finding a job or job training.

Technically, however, the job of the parole officer is to monitor the parolee's adherence to a set of rules, and the parole officer has neither the time nor the resources to oversee the most important parts of the prisoner's reintegration into society. If parolees fail a drug test or break a curfew, the parole officer is expected to "violate" them, and send them back to jail. There is no evidence to suggest that sending parolees back to jail for technical violations is a positive development for parolees, for prisons, or for society at large. Alternative sentencing that focuses on

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Brian Colon: Living Life Inside Out

"Finally the time has arrived where an ex-offender has somewhere to go for guidance, education and inspiration. The time has arrived for ex-offenders to use this site and live LIFEINSIDEOUT!"



So goes the message on FAC Board member Brian Colon's website. Brian came to FAC in 1998 when he was 21 and just out of prison after serving four years on a violent felony conviction. He was determined to find a job, but his criminal record was getting in the way with all the employers he applied to. He began visiting FAC on a regular basis until he finally got a position at one of FAC's own community enterprises, Ecomat (a non-toxic alternative to dry-cleaning), where he worked for two years. FAC also helped him to escape an intolerable living situation with his alcoholic mother, and to move into his own apartment in a FAC-owned building. Once employed and living on his own, Brian quickly focused his energies on working to help other ex-prisoners, and he's hardly stopped to breathe since.

First he worked with Darryl King to get Developing Justice started, as one of the core members of the Criminal Justice Working Group at FAC. Then he began working in the prisoner reentry field and he is now training coordinator at CASES, the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services. He also is on the FAC Board of Directors and works closely with both the Developing Justice program and FAC's economic development arm, Brooklyn Workforce Innovations. He's studying toward a degree in business, and he just signed his first consulting contract to coordinate a workshop for ex-prisoners.

Another of Brian's projects is a motivational speakers bureau of ex-prisoners that travels to high schools and group homes around New York City, talking with kids about how to stay out of prison. He believes that public speaking is a good way for ex-prisoners to break out of the inertia that often consumes them when they find themselves back on the streets without a job or any prospects-and of course, they help a lot of at-risk kids in the process. He calls it "puttin' them on Broadway."

Referring to his own experience making presentations at award dinners and funders' conferences, he points out that once you build up expectations in an audience, and see they want you to succeed, you're not as willing to let them down. He says that many ex-prisoners have lost a sense of self, or the only sense they have is one of anger and victimization. "A lot of these guys think that the world owes them something." Brian's basic teaching is that ex-prisoners need to learn to help themselves, and understand that they are accountable for their actions even within the context of an often unjust system. "Once you learn how to be humble and start helping yourself you'll see other hands reaching out to help you too. Then you start believing in yourself."

causes behind specific parole violations could help parolees manage successful reintegration into society, but in most situations alternative sentencing is not available.

Jeremy Travis of the Urban Institute suggests that we rethink the cost and effectiveness of the parole system. “Let’s imagine a world in which we spent the same amount of money per month during the first three months after release as we do for the three months prior to release. This would cost about \$7,000 for every prisoner returning home. We now spend almost that amount for the entire period of parole supervision in New York, but let’s front-load this expenditure to the first three months back in the community. This money would support transitional housing, if needed, employment if no other job could be found, drug treatment, medical attention, family counseling – in short, whatever was required to increase the odds of successful transition. Part of this money would also fund a community-based support network. This network would include case managers serving as advocates for the returning prisoner, and an organization of ex-prisoners who had gone straight and could provide invaluable guidance to the latest returning prisoner.”¹⁷

At Developing Justice, we have already gone a long way toward creating the infrastructure that Travis advocates. However, we have none of the financial support from the criminal justice system that he proposes. We are therefore beginning to strategize for the creation of a state program to support community-based efforts across New York. This fund, which we have called the New York State Justice Reinvestment Fund, would work closely with state and local criminal justice agencies (corrections, parole, probation, juvenile justice) in contracting with not-for-profit community and faith-based organizations involved in such activities as:

- Re-entry support for returning prisoners (job development, housing assistance, educational and vocational training)
 - Alternatives-to-incarceration (community service programs, community youth court, alternative high schools, service-enriched supportive housing, community-based drug treatment programs)
 - Family-support programs (fatherhood/parenting programs) for prisoners and ex-prisoners
 - Other community-based collaborations with criminal justice agencies
- Critical components of the program would include:
- Focusing on those communities in New York State where prisoners and ex-prisoners are concentrated.
 - Directing financial support to genuine community-based and faith-based organizations located in—and accountable to—the affected communities.
 - Encouraging state and local criminal justice agencies, courts, district attorneys, and criminal defense offices to work in partnership with community-based and faith-based organizations.
 - Encouraging applicants to demonstrate how their program will reduce crime and recidivism.

One way to pay for such a program would be through “justice reinvestment,” a term coined by Eric Cadora of the Open Society Institute. The concept of justice reinvestment evolved from the success of community reinvestment, which requires banks to invest in the low-income communities where they do business. It means reducing the amount the state spends on prisons, and applying the savings to community justice programs in high-incarceration areas. For example, New York State could send fewer people back to prison for technical parole violations, and thus save the estimated \$2,400 monthly that is required to keep a prisoner in New York prisons.¹⁸ Some of the savings could then be used to pay for community-based programs like drug treatment or job training.

On the national level, Developing Justice is working to help build a national network of community organizations focused on prisoner re-entry, alternatives to incarceration, and criminal justice reform. We hope that other community organizations in low-income neighborhoods will join us both in building an infrastructure of community-based programs, and in our broader vision of community justice.

Staffed by people who have been in prison, and guided by community activists, Developing Justice tackles problems at their roots, with local resources and skills. It demonstrates how “community justice,” in addition to providing alternatives to traditional law enforcement, sentencing, and parole, also provides a way of ensuring that community voices are heard in the ongoing national dialogue about justice policy, crime prevention, and policing. Developing Justice means gathering community members together to discuss national and regional issues, and to brainstorm about how to solve local problems. It means demanding local participation in state and federal decisions that disproportionately affect our community. And it means helping our neighbor prepare for a job interview, or find an apartment. In other words, it means justice for the community, by the community, and in the community.

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Foreword



When a funder is asked to write something about an organization it supports, the usual approach is to speak in broad public policy terms, invoking all the buzzwords about social impact, sustainability, replicability and the like. I could do all that with respect to FAC's Developing Justice Program, which the Open Society Institute has been privileged to support since its inception. But I can't help seeing it primarily in community and human terms.

I live a few blocks from FAC's Fifth Avenue office. It is MY community organization, and I have long admired the work it does to preserve and expand affordable housing in our neighborhood and help residents acquire the skills for decent jobs at good wages. When FAC came to the Open Society Institute for help in starting Developing Justice, we readily agreed, both because we understood the huge need for assistance faced by the 600,000 men and women who return to their communities from prison each year, and because we knew that FAC's deep roots in the community and hard-won expertise in housing and employment made it the perfect organization to undertake this work.

When I was privileged to be given a sabbatical from my work at OSI last year, I volunteered to work with the Developing Justice Program, and in the months I spent there I talked with dozens of program participants and heard their stories. Reflecting the way in which America's prisons have become society's answer to persistent and systemic poverty and inequality, virtually every participant in the program has the same three things in common: they are non-white, they were involved in drug-related crimes and they didn't finish high school.

Distressing as it is to learn of the wasted years of men and women whose mistakes cost them their youth, it was and remains deeply inspirational to me to see the determination that is turning their lives around, overcoming the obstacles of discrimination, poverty and substandard schooling.

You can't come to know Fernanda or Hulen as I have – or Darryl, Julian and Eddie, the FAC staff who work with them and many others, whose own transformations are an inspiration to all of us – without having your own beliefs and assumptions challenged about the men and women among us who wind up behind bars. I can't see them any longer as ex-prisoners, defined only by their worst acts. I see them as neighbors, whose best selves contribute to their families and communities. And I see them as friends.

In reading this account of FAC's Developing Justice Program, I hope you will come to feel the same way. And by the way, it is sustainable AND replicable, and I hope that hundreds of other community-based organizations around the country follow FAC's example.

Gara LaMarche

Jasper Kelley

Jasper Kelley, a local barber, is best known for his work on Rikers Island teaching adolescents the strength of poetry and the spoken word. He also has worked with at-risk youth in Otisville, New York, and facilitated workshops in the Youth Assistant Program. He has performed at various venues around New York City, such as the Nuyorican Poet Café, the Soul Café, The Sugar Shack, and Bronx Community College and at various community forums in Brooklyn sponsored by the Fifth Avenue Committee.

When Jasper came to Developing Justice in April of 2002, he was in his mid-thirties and had just been released after ten years in prison. Jasper was a tough case – he wasn't sure if he wanted to help himself when he showed up at Developing Justice. "I was a little apprehensive and anxious to do better and at times I became frustrated. I didn't know how to deal with setbacks and letdowns."

Julian and Eddie played to his strengths, particularly his love of poetry. He read his poetry in the office, and they invited him to perform at an upcoming Developing Justice event. They were trying to get him involved in leadership workshops when he was involved in an altercation with a police officer and was sent to Rikers Island.

Jasper has now served his time, and he's back in the Developing Justice program. He's scheduled a road test, and is looking for a training program in order to find a driving job. Through his difficulties, Jasper has gained the respect of the organizing community in Brooklyn. He continues to use his writing and performance talents to put a real face on the ex-prisoner, and to raise awareness of the need for support networks for former prisoners within communities. He also is helping to start FAC's Criminal Injustice Tees, a grassroots social business that aims to use t-shirt art as a form of consciousness-raising about criminal justice issues.

I only ask for Justice

I only ask for Justice
I never beg for Mercy
For mercy implies that I am guilty of a wrong
So I sing the song for fairness
Cause their laws are careless
When it comes to me and mine
They try to leave us behind
And keep us truth blind
The whole thing is so complex
But I see the prison industrial complex
Springing up until they're sprung,
Until they're filled to capacity
With Black and Latino bodies, ripe with life,
But how can we live with 2 million of ours
Stored away to rot away & swing & sway
On razor wire behind tower walls in the two man cages
Let us develop a justice that will rewrite the pages
And transcend the ages of political democracy
That's filled with hypocrisy
So we can afford to have children again
And they'll be able to afford to die.
It's been a long time coming
But I know change gonna come &
I never wonder why.