

## OREGON IS CALLING!

We're both excited and grateful to announce ION's expansion to Oregon. We've been having positive conversations with the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) for several months. And, as I write, we're finalizing an official letter of support from ODOC, with a Memorandum of Understanding to follow in due course. In addition to working with the state department of corrections, we'll also have working relationships with county-based Community Corrections staff (combining both probation and parole). We'll also be partnering with Portland State University's Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice to offer internships to their students.

Armed with ODOC's letter of support and some starter reentry databases, we'll begin our networking efforts in earnest, reaching out to various reentry coalitions and service providers to begin registering them on the ION platform. Once we reach an already agreed-upon benchmark of registered providers, we'll begin training ODOC and county Community Correction staff to begin registering adults in custody and returning citizens.

A big shout-out to the folks at Ministry Partners for Christ for their generous support to allow us to expand our network to a third state. We're off to a good start and are looking forward to meeting a lot more wonderful, generous, hard-working, and inspiring partners in the Pacific Northwest and to making an impact together. Stay tuned.

## LOOKING AHEAD/NEXT UP...

There are always a lot of things bubbling under the surface and around the edges of our work. Some of them are crucial administratively (like the new employee handbook) but not exactly newsletter-worthy. Here's a list of a few that we think you might find interesting...

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## LOOKING AHEAD/NEXT UP... (continued from Pg 1)

- We have a new agreement in place with the AZ Dept. of Corrections to begin extensive and regular in-person training of staff. We're currently undergoing security clearances so that our staff can enter every Arizona prison. Once that's done (soon, we hope), we'll start hitting the road!
- We've begun floating the possibility of leading a "Community Reentry Coaching Initiative" in collaboration with two county reentry coalitions in Southern Arizona. We see a massive opportunity to equip and engage family, friends, and justice-involved peers to serve as reentry coaches and help men and women leaving incarceration in their efforts to desist from crime. Early responses have been very positive, but we're waiting to see if there's a critical mass of support and buy-in from key stakeholders and funders before taking any next steps.
- We've begun partnering with Coach and Pastor Lee Robbins in the Atlanta area. Pastor Robbins is using our book, *Spiritual Survival Guide for Prison and Beyond*, with returning citizens, and is discussing the possibility of using the ION platform in Georgia on a limited, pilot basis with several private prisons.
- In the fall, we designed and ran a large-scale statewide reentry network mapping survey, in partnership with the AZ Dept. of Corrections and Visible Network Labs. We had over 150 survey participants—a significant response. Specialized network data analysts from VNL are crunching the data, and the report is scheduled to be released in November. Once that's ready, we'll hold webinars to share the survey results with participants, various reentry coalitions, and with the public at large. Look for a summary report in our next newsletter.



## MEET BOARD MEMBER: **JUSTIN BENJAMIN**

Justin had an unconventional education when it comes to the corrections industry. His experience began when he became a justice-involved youth at the age of 17. He successfully paid his debt to society over a period

of 10 years. He then formed alliances with his community supervision office and began working to help those incarcerated.

In 2007, he began work in the behavioral health sector in northern Arizona. He has worked in private substance abuse clinics, Regional Behavioral Health public clinics, and hospitals helping those with substance use disorders and forensic backgrounds.

Today Justin strives to be a role model and demonstrate that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to those who are previously justice-involved. His uncanny ability to build connections with anyone he meets is the native Texan shining through. When he is not making connections in the world of reentry, he is making them on the football field where he has played and coached, or on the mats in some of the top MMA gyms across Arizona.

Saying Justin has a large family is an understatement. He is father to four daughters and one son and has a new granddaughter. Justin knows what it takes to grow strong communities and does just that here in Arizona, sharing with those who will listen to what he believes. He works hard to live his motto: "Know it, Do it, and Believe it."

## INCREASING WELCOME IN FAITH COMMUNITIES

A key landing spot for many people leaving incarceration is a welcoming faith community. But it can take some intentionality to be truly welcoming to people making this transition, and not every congregation that wants to do this well knows where to start.

ION is in the first phase of a project meant to address that challenge. Thanks to an idea and supporting funding from Arthur Winter, an attorney based in Evanston, Illinois, we're sending out a survey to congregations of all shapes, sizes, and faith traditions to find out how

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## RETURNING CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT: SERGIO HERNANDEZ

ION's main goal is to help reduce the feelings of invisibility and isolation for those who have recently been released from incarceration. Not only do we work with departments of corrections to enroll people pre-release, but our staff also engages with returning citizens who have recently been released.

Every Friday, one of our program managers, Maddi, visits New Freedom in Phoenix. New Freedom is a 90-day behavioral health program that provides housing, coursework, and health care for those transitioning back into society. While at this facility, Maddi talks with the residents and gets a chance to share information about ION, register those who are interested, and get to know a bit about them and their goals. Sergio Hernandez is one of the individuals who is completing the program at New Freedom and who signed up on ION while at the facility. Several weeks after Sergio enrolled in the network, he agreed to an interview with Maddi regarding his reentry.

**Maddi:** *What have been some of your biggest surprises?*

**Sergio:** Upon release I came right to New Freedom. I was surprised there were programs such as this that are so helpful. I was also surprised in how the world operated since my incarceration, such as all the grocery stores have self-checkout and the prevalence of social media.



**Maddi:** *What have your biggest challenges been?*

**Sergio:** My biggest challenge has been that everything is virtual. Even for the DMV, I have to do everything online. I have had trouble navigating transportation because even bus schedules are online. The bus times will change based on location of the bus, but it gets very confusing.

**Maddi:** *What's gone well—even better than you might have expected?*

**Sergio:** Although technology was a barrier to begin with, I have been able to learn and adjust. I created a resume and got a job with Community Bridges. I also began school at Grand Canyon University studying behavioral health with an emphasis on substance abuse.

**Maddi:** *How has ION contributed to your journey?*

**Sergio:** ION has helped me reach out to Father Matters. I was not able to get ahold of them via email or phone prior to using ION. But, since I was able to message them through the platform, I scheduled an appointment for next week. I am really grateful for ION because it helped me access resources that I could not before. I was experiencing depression because I could not get ahold of things I needed, but ION allows me to have access to those who can help, 24/7.

## INCREASING WELCOME IN FAITH COMMUNITIES *(continued from Pg 2)*

they're engaging with returning citizens. We want to discover what's working well (and why) and what's challenging (and why). We're hoping to discover reproducible models of reentry ministry and pathways that ordinary congregations of various faith traditions can follow. Our goal is to create a practical how-to guide, "Effective Reentry Ministry for Ordinary Congregations," that will empower more congregations to engage in reentry ministry in a way that fits them.

This is a simple information-gathering survey that takes only 10-15 minutes to complete. We encourage you to send the following link to anyone you know who's involved in congregation-based reentry ministry—or who might know someone who is. Or else send their contact info to Carol Breimeier at [carol@insideoutnetwork.net](mailto:carol@insideoutnetwork.net). That's the place to direct any questions or comments as well.

Here's that link: [Reentry Congregations Initiative Survey](#).  
And thanks!



## ARIZONA UPDATE

Our Arizona team continues to actively grow and reach out to returning citizens (RCs), service providers, and reentry coalitions, in an effort to strengthen the reentry community throughout the state and ease the reentry process for RCs.

Arizona Program Manager Miranda Campos visits the Second Chance Center at the state prison complex in Tucson to do monthly presentations about ION for those who are in the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) program. This wonderful program focuses on cognitive behavioral treatment for high-risk/high-needs individuals. We are so grateful to all who make this possible. A big thank-you to the Program Manager of RSAT, Leslie Baxley, and the amazing work she does for this program! You can watch this video to see how lives have been changed as a result of RSAT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luhKQE5CBUY>.

Additionally, thanks to support from reentry partners such as DJ Cruse from the ADCRR, ION Program Manager Maddi Briguglio has been visiting the Maricopa Reentry Center (MRC) to present ION to RCs. This center has been designed to help those who are not quite ready to be back in the community receive the treatment they need in order to be successful with their re-entry. We hope to be able to connect with the residents at the MRC on a regular basis moving forward.

We are also continuing to work with Community Corrections via probation and parole to educate RCs about using ION to help them find resources.

Lastly, ION Program Managers Miranda and Maddi volunteered at Tucson Federal Prison Facilities in September, where they got to help those who are incarcerated with mock interviews, give feedback on their resumés, provide professional development tips, etc. It was such a wonderful day! These men worked hard to prepare, they wanted to make changes, and they were full of hope and were eager to learn. We were so grateful to have had this opportunity!

As of September 30, we have 2695 returning citizens enrolled in Arizona and 163 providers across the state.



## ILLINOIS UPDATE

ION and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) are currently exploring new options for returning citizen registration. With less of a focus on the current pre-release paper-based registration system, IDOC will be piloting a new program in some of their facilities where incarcerated individuals can utilize computers in the re-entry resource rooms to access the ION platform. In addition, there will be a greater focus on community corrections involvement, as ION will be working with parole, probation, and other re-entry partners to register more returning citizens post-release.

We are also looking to increase involvement with the county jails throughout the state. Currently, the Cook County Sheriff's Department Resource Center is including our info flyers in the exit packet for those who get released from the jail. We are exploring the possibility of implementing this in the DuPage County Correctional Facility and other sites.

Lastly, an update: As of September 30, 2022, Illinois has 2,256 returning citizens enrolled in the platform along with 215 registered service providers.

The Inside Out Network is always a free service for returning citizens

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