

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEN IN ORANGE

Move over, Men in Black. It's time to make way for the Men in Orange. Men wearing prison orange, dressed like all the others. But these particular men—Reentry Preparation Specialists and Recovery Support Specialists—are men with a difference, men on a mission. And they're my new heroes.

Fourteen times in the last three weeks, we've gone into a prison unit in Arizona for the rollout of the ION platform on library computers. We're usually there for an hour and a bit. We give an overview, explain new procedures and logistics, and do a live demo on smallish computer terminals that have been specially configured to connect to the internet so that incarcerated men and women can send and receive messages with reentry service providers. These training events are usually attended by the librarian and a number of correctional officers. But at the heart of the entire process sit the Men in Orange. Many of them have been hearing about ION for the last two years. *Hearing.* But now, for the first time, they're *seeing* the ION platform in action, accessible and right in front of them. To a man, they're leaning in, nodding, asking questions. They're having a light bulb moment. The enthusiasm is palpable.

These Men in Orange have a very particular role to play. They are "peers," fellow inmates, just like all the others around them. But they're also helpers. Their basic job description is to come alongside others to

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PARTNERS IN REENTRY PREPARATION

The Inside Out Network and Second Chance Center were on a collision course even if neither party knew it. It is only a matter of time before these like-minded organizations would link up and start collaborating when they have so many shared values.

Second Chance Center is a reentry program that was built in 2017 on a partnership between the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry and the state Department of Economic Securi-

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PARTNERS IN REENTRY PREPARATION

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ty. The Second Chance Center offers participants an eight-week job readiness curriculum at an on-site Arizona at Work location. It currently has three locations and a fourth is set to open at the Lewis Prison complex next month. SCC is committed to reducing the recidivism rate in Arizona and targets those offenders who have the highest likelihood of coming back to prison. The current recidivism rate in the state of Arizona is hovering right around 36%, but participants graduating from Second Chance are currently reoffending at a rate of 11%.

As we stated from the beginning, ION and Second Chance were on a collision course, and that fateful day happened in May of 2023 when the Director of Operations for ION came in to do a question and answer session with Community Corrections (Parole). There was an immediate realization of the potential for collaboration between these two organizations. Since then, Maddi Briguglio, ION's director of operations (affectionately called the Resource Whisperer by the peer facilitators who work at Phoenix West SCC), has been a fixture. She regularly comes in to teach SCC participants about the Inside Out Network, how to sign up, and how to navigate the site that provides access to over two hundred service providers in Arizona. This service has helped countless returning community members achieve success upon reentering society.

Second Chance Center currently offers fourteen classes of mandatory programming for participants who are within two

to six months of their release. These classes are 95% peer-led by Recovery Support Specialists (RSSs) and include but are not limited to: Victim's Impact, Intense Substance Abuse, Parenting, Money Management, and Trauma. They also offer a Re-entry class that allows several community partners to come in and explain their services. This class empowers participants to be autonomous and create their own reentry plan based on the resources that best fit their needs.

Second Chance Center also offers thirteen different short-term vocational trade training classes. Some of these are CDL (commercial driver's license), HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), Culinary, Coding, Graphic Design, Entrepreneurship, and Behavioral Health Paraprofessional training. These classes are founded on community partnerships that offer continued education upon participants' release. ***Second Chance Center is committed to connecting participants to purpose.***

When returning community members find their **WHY**, the result is individuals living healthy and connected lives. The fruit of this program empowers returning citizens to take their rightful place in society and add the value they were always meant to add.

Second Chance Center is always open to new opportunities and collaborations. If you would like to learn more about what we do or partner with us, please contact Program Manager Don Verett at 520-840-8260.

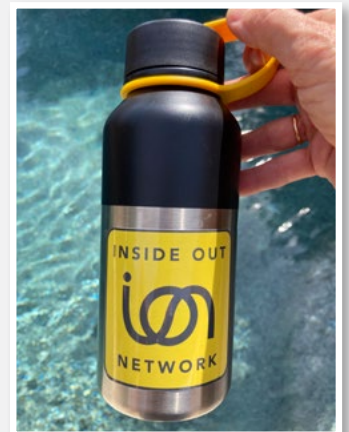


COLOR ME YELLOW 24 TALLY

We are extremely grateful to everyone who contributed to our Color Me Yellow fall campaign. Your generosity is making a difference in the lives of many men and women.

We did come up short of our goal this time around, largely because one potential large donor needed to withdraw their pledge. That said, we celebrate the positive, and that's that you-all combined to give us just over \$40,000 in funding to fuel all the work that you're reading about in this newsletter.

For fun this year, and to express our thanks, we sent out ION water bottles (see photo) to the first 25 donors who gave \$75 or more.





MISSISSIPPI UPDATE

40 down. 10 to go. We're almost there. What a long and strange road it's been so far to recruit the initial critical mass of reentry service providers to be able to launch statewide in Mississippi. With a strong push from our Program Assistant, Madison Gunnels, at the end of the year, we now have forty registered service providers and are looking to register a minimum of ten more before we launch publicly. We want to make sure that returning citizens have a reasonably large number of providers to choose from for it to be a good experience. Even as we plug away at service provider recruitment, we're working with Mississippi Department of Corrections leadership to line up how ION will be rolled out inside prison facilities and on inmate computer tablets. We're now looking at the summer of 2025. Stay tuned.



OREGON UPDATE

As a reminder, in May of 2024, we launched returning citizen registration in Oregon. We started with a pilot launch at two Oregon Department of Correction (ODOC) facilities, Deer Ridge and Warner Creek, where both have allowed Adults in Custody (AICs) who are within 6 months of their release to register on the ION platform. Since then, seven more facilities have gone live! Returning citizens are now eligible for registration at the following facilities (in addition to the two previously mentioned): Coffee Creek, Powder River, Santiam, Oregon State Correctional Institution, Snake River, Two Rivers, and Columbia River Correctional Institution. We are waiting on deployment at the final two facilities, and they are close to the finish line. Importantly, those registering are then given the opportunity to schedule regular sessions to log in and use the ION platform to connect with providers in the community prior to their release.

Total number of returning citizens registered in Oregon as of the end of January: **534**.

We also continue to grow our provider network throughout the state. Total as of January 31: **86 providers, 105 total locations**.



ARIZONA UPDATE



The clear headline this time is our rollout in prison libraries in the state facilities. We covered a key aspect of the rollout, the role of "peer specialists," in our lead article. What we didn't mention is the reception by prison staff. Across the board, we're receiving strong support and active cooperation. From the statewide IT team to the front-line tech guys in each prison complex who are running the wiring to the librarians to the correctional staff responsible for crafting the release plan for each returning citizen, we've had nothing but cooperation and follow-through. There's a buzz among the staff. Everybody sees it as a win.

Once we've rolled out in the state-run facilities, we'll turn our attention to rolling out in the privately-run prisons, which release approximately 25% of incarcerated men. We've already begun the process of working with their national reentry teams, and things are progressing nicely.

But this turbocharging of returning citizen registrations, searches, and messaging also comes with an expectation that service providers will be ready and willing to respond to this growing opportunity. If inmates are messaging providers and not getting responses, the whole system starts to lose credibility. That's why we're currently reaching out to our 200+ Arizona providers to make sure they understand both their opportunity and their responsibility to be active and responsive in order to remain part of the ION network. For the sake of the whole process, we need to clear out any "deadwood" from our network of providers.

Finally, a little teaser for you. We're on the precipice of an exciting initiative with the Arizona Dept. of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry. It's still under wraps until we meet with the Director and other top leadership in the coming week to finalize plans. If it's a go, we'll tell you all about it in the next issue.

ONWARD INTO 2025! COMING SOON TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU: OREGON RESOURCE NETWORK

Out there somewhere (Chicago, maybe? Our tech guys know where.) sits a server that's hosting a new website under development. It's called the Oregon Resource Network. When it launches soon, it'll help connect job seekers to employers and employment services across eastern Washington. And we can't wait.

Here's why. The thing about this particular website is that it's built on the same structure and user experience as our ION platform. Basically, we cloned our ION site to act as the functional template, and we've been busy working with our clients (and friends) from East Cascades Works to modify it to work for the people they serve. Like us, they're in the "connecting business." We were honored and thrilled to enter into a contract with them to help build and maintain their new website over the next couple of years. We'll let you know when it launches publicly.



EFFECTIVE REENTRY MINISTRY FOR ORDINARY CONGREGATIONS



Several years ago, we undertook a broad national survey of what's happening (and what isn't) in congregation-based reentry ministry. In the process, we discovered reproducible models of reentry ministry and eight distinct pathways that ordinary congregations can explore. We've also developed a new reentry paradigm for understanding justice, those returning from incarceration, and ways to engage with them. Later this year we'll be publishing a 50-page how-to guide to inform, inspire, and empower ordinary congregations to engage in reentry ministry in a way that fits them.

Each of these eight ministry models tries to offer a clear message (in italics, below), both to the congregation and to returning citizens, that the congregation understands their need and that it has something of value to offer them.

Here are the eight models in brief.

1. **The Service Station Model.** *You've been through a lot and we know you have a lot of needs right now. Come and get some of what you need.*
2. **The Recovery Fellowship Model.** *We're on a journey from addiction to real freedom. Come and work your sobriety with us.*
3. **The Coach/Mentor Connection Model.** *Reentry is tough to figure out on your own. Come and get connected to someone who can help you find your way and take your next steps.*
4. **The Peer-led Ministry Model.** *We get you because we've been there and we're just like you. Come for "church on the inside," the outside version.*
5. **The Jail to Congregation Pipeline Model.** *We've already connected on the inside. Come and join us on the outside.*
6. **The Life-Changing Small Group Model.** *God's already been at work in your life. Come and keep growing spiritually and as a leader in a welcoming and supportive group setting.*
7. **The Whole Family Support Model.** *Come with your family. We're here for all of you.*
8. **The Mission Station Model.** *You have a lot to offer. Come with your passion, gifts, and skills, and let's make a difference together.*

MEN IN ORANGE

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raise awareness, be a source of hope and practical information, and facilitate positive change for those who are working to recover from addiction (the Recovery Support Specialists) or preparing for reentry into the community (the Reentry Preparation Specialists). They're a dedicated bunch, positive and serious about their work.

We explain to them that their particular role with ION is to be the "evangelists and guardians" of the process. They're to actively seek out fellow inmates who are 11 months prior to their release date to (a) make them aware of the opportunity ION provides, (b) help them register, (c) encourage them to keep searching for help and messaging providers, and (d) make sure everyone uses the ION site responsibly. Not everyone they approach will take advantage of the opportunity, but many will. In fact, many already have: registration rates have taken off in the last few weeks and we're not even halfway done with our rollout.

At the prison I visited most recently, the remote Apache Unit in east-central Arizona, I asked three of these specialists why they do what they do. I asked, "What's your deep motivation?" The first Man in Orange said, "To give back." He went on about how good and right it feels to help someone else. The second said, "Compassion." And then he talked about the transformative power of digging deeper into what led them (himself and all those around him) to find themselves in prison. "Everybody has a story in here," he said. And the third said, "To show that there's something more and greater out there. That there's a ray of hope." And then, a bit sheepishly, he added, "I know it sounds

corny, but to make a better world." *Nothing* corny about that.

A little later, as I was getting ready to leave, the first guy came up and asked me why *I* do this work. I said, "I don't know if this will mean anything to you, but my deepest and truest reason is that God has called me to this wonderful work." He smiled and said, in a half-whisper, "Yeah, me too. This is my ministry." Some Men in Orange are secular. Others are deeply religious. Either way, all of them are bound together in their sacred mission to come alongside others to offer life-changing encouragement and support.

Think about these things. Today, this very day, there are several hundred Men in Orange (and Women in Orange, too, but I haven't had the privilege to meet them yet) who are actively coming alongside fellow men and women dressed in orange in order to give back, to show compassion, to make the world a better place, and to follow God's call on their lives to be agents of hope. There's a passage in the Bible that says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

So, if you're tempted to feel a bit depressed and cynical about the state of the world these days, think about *these things*. Think about *them*. Think *Orange*. There's more hope and restoration at work than we can see.

~Fred

WHAT WE'RE READING

CRIME AND THE LIFE COURSE: AN INTRODUCTION.

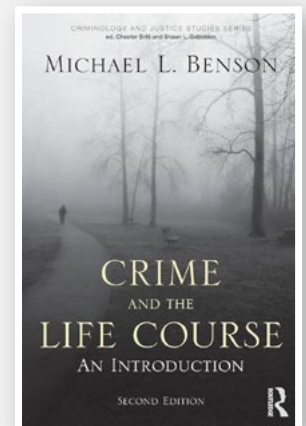
Second Edition. Michael L. Benson.

New York: Routledge, 2013. 239 pages.

This is one fascinating, helpful, well-written book. "Life course" criminology is an approach that examines criminal behavior through the lens of how individuals move through different stages of their life (biological background, the family, adolescence, adulthood) as well as the external impact of historical change and social conditions on them as they develop. There are some (to me) surprising statistics that biologically based differences (genetic variation) account for roughly 50% of antisocial behavior. This is a far cry from saying that there's a "crime gene," but it shows that genetics does play a role, especially when this

is combined with parenting styles that are harsh, distant, or missing in action. There's also a lot of helpful discussion about the capacity for change and the role of personal agency during the life course. Each of the chapters ends with a succinct summary and a list of main points—a nice feature, even for those of us who aren't cramming for a test!

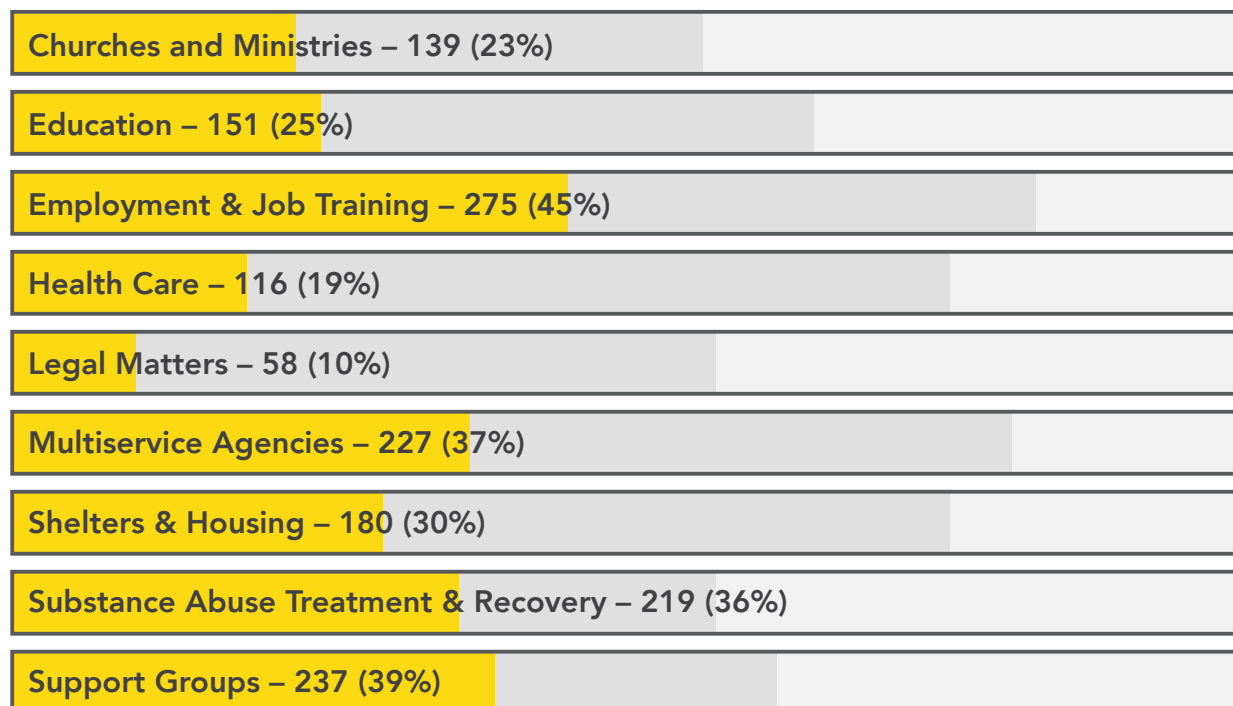
There's so much woven together and packed into this book that the process of thumbing through it again makes me want to reread it and underline about half of it. If you tend to have a bunch of different ideas bouncing around in your head about criminal behavior and are looking to bring them together in a more unified perspective, do yourself a favor and read this book.



STATS SNAPSHOT

In our last newsletter, we shared which service provider categories returning citizens expressed interest in, by percentage (marked below in medium gray). One way to think of that is in terms of relative “demand.” For this issue of the newsletter, we thought we’d share the raw number of listings for each of our nine service provider categories. Think of what follows as the “supply.” At the end of January, we had 612 registered service providers. Among them, there are 1,602 category listings, since many organizations engage in a variety of services.

Here’s the breakdown, showing the raw number of listings, followed by the percentage of ION providers who offer this category. The medium gray bar represents the percent of returning citizens interest.



THE MORE YOU KNOW...

Not quite sure how the ION platform works? Or having trouble describing it to a friend? You can watch an explanatory video at insideoutnetwork.net/overview or on [YouTube](#).



INSIDE OUT
NETWORK

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

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