

Network News: Clients Stories

2022

Baystate Reentry Network

Robert A

Robert A is a Level III Sex Offender. He was in prison for 12 years and then on Probation for 10. During those ten years he has never taken his eyes off his goals: to be self-supporting, law-abiding, and a good friend and family member. He has repaired some broken relationships and mourned others that will never be repaired. He has educated himself and learned new skills, and now runs his own business. He has lived in shelters and apartments, and now owns his home. He is lucky in that his family stood by him during his worst time, when he was arrested and convicted and locked up. Without that emotional support, he says, he might not have made it.

The way forward, for someone with his criminal history, is very rocky now; eleven years ago it was much harder. Robert applied for help – housing, work, training programs - and was rejected by nearly all. At that time only St Francis House was doing any work with those who committed a sexual offense, and even they were careful to limit the numbers. In order to pay his probation fees, Robert did community service at St Francis House, and it was people he met there who helped him to get an ID and eventually an apartment.



“An organization specifically tailored to meet the needs of people convicted of sexual offenses is critical to putting people on the path to responsible citizenship, and never re-

Robert is a highly skilled professional. He has (many times) applied for work at his skill level, and been rejected because he does not have a professional license – but the Licensing Board won't give him a license because he does not have the proper work experience. The technical

term for this is a Catch-22, and it is a major reason for Robert's eventual decision to start his own business.

In order to get to where he is today, Robert has done a lot of thinking, reflecting on why he committed his crimes and how to be a better person now than he was then. This

process began when he found a non-judgmental friend, with whom he began to share feelings he had never talked about before. “For years,” he says, “I had tried to be someone I wasn't – but in prison everything was stripped away. I lost everything; my work, my wife, my standing in the community.”

Baystate Reentry Network

The first two years in prison were very hard, including a few beatings from other prisoners (organized by the correction officers), but eventually he found his feet and began to recover his self-confidence with the help of his friend and family. He also helped others, by tutoring people for the GED test, which made him realize he could do good things as well as bad.

The prison system is a massive institution, and it has its own rules and a lot of power over the people inside it. Often the rules make no sense at all, sometimes they seem designed to make things worse or to tease and torture people with impossible demands, sometimes they are reasonable. At all times, they are the rules!

And if you want to ever get out you must “play the game” with them. Robert makes a sharp distinction between playing this game, as everyone must, and real personal change. About treatment inside he says “I took the pieces that were relevant to me.” He adds that Houses of Healing is a great book.

“One day at a time; stay in the moment; ask for help and tend to your relationships. If you are isolated or don’t have honest relationships, you

Robert was released from prison before BayState Reentry Network (BRN) was established. His family and a few friends, as well as the very few agencies that would help him, plus his own inner strength, enabled him to fight his way to where he is today. Precisely because his own struggle has been so hard, and because he has seen others unable to overcome the barriers, Robert was one of the original members of BRN, and has cheerfully volunteered hours and hours of his time to helping others who were in a place just as he was once

in his life. “The challenges that sex offenders leaving prison face,” he says, “underscore the need for Baystate Reentry Network services. There is no

handbook for when you get out. Many doors are close. So, an organization specifically tailored to meet the needs of people convicted of sexual offenses is critical to putting people on the path to responsible citizenship, and never re-offending.”

Robert’s advice

Robert notes that the personal changes he has made have affected every relationship he has, including with his family. In the past he tried to hide his problems and vulnerabilities, but now everything is on the table. Good relationships, he says, must

include your vulnerability; no one is all good or all bad, and only with honesty can we make progress.

Does Robert have any advice for other people who are struggling with these issues? “One day at a time; stay in the moment; ask for help and tend to your relationships. If you are isolated or don’t have honest relationships, you won’t move forward. And don’t give up ever.”



BRN
Baystate Reentry Network

PO Box 57
Prides Crossing, MA 01965
www.baystaterentrynetwork.org