



# COMMON GROUND

JULY 2017 ISSUE

**MEET WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**

**VAL HARRIS**

**PATHS TO  
EMPLOYMENT**

**AN INSIDE LOOK AT  
THE BOSTON REENTRY INITIATIVE**



# Sheriff's Statement



As many frequent readers of our newsletter already know, our mandate at the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department is for the care and custody of the men and women who are remanded to our facilities by the courts.

Within this mandate, it is our mission to deliver the kinds of addiction recovery and mental health services, life skills and educational programming that help to prepare our population for a successful reentry, armed with the ability to better care for themselves and their families.

We strive to realize this mission by providing job training and skills building programs with a sharp focus on vocational education and employment preparedness. Our Paths To Employment program – featured in this issue – and R.I.S.E. (Re-Entry Initiatives to Successful Employment) program give incarcerated men and women the opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives from several businesses for a series of mock job interviews that help to strengthen participants' interview skills, while providing employers with a look at potential future employees. Enrollees in our Common Ground Institute are trained in such classes as urban farming, tailoring, retail skills, culinary arts, carpentry, landscaping, small engine repair and basic automotive, painting and a host of other vocational skills.

Additionally, we offer PDAT (Professional Development and Attitudinal Training), a program that stresses proper job interview etiquette, technique and dress. Upon completion of their sentences, the formerly incarcerated can visit our Clothing Closet to be outfitted with interview-appropriate attire to take home, free-of-charge. With these new skills and materials in hand, returning citizens seeking jobs can reconnect with Workforce Development Manager Val Harris (also featured in this issue), who works on their behalves to maintain and create new relationships with businesses across and beyond Suffolk County to secure CORI-friendly employment. These programs and services are offered in concert with many others as part of the larger effort undertaken by the Department to try and improve the lives of those in our care and custody, which in turn serves to strengthen the health, safety and vibrancy of all of our communities.

**-Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins**

# Index

## Paths to Employment Event

Read about the Department's mock interview fair for female inmates at the Suffolk County House of Correction.



## Employee Profile: Val Harris

Meet Val Harris, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Workforce Development Manager.

## Boston Reentry Initiative Prepares Inmates for Release, Future Success

Take a look inside the Boston Reentry Initiative, a program that focus on mentoring, information sharing, treating addiction and providing employment opportunities for inmates after release.



## In Their Own Words

Three women currently incarcerated at the Suffolk County House of Correction share their thoughts about returning to their communities as well as their plans for life beyond incarceration.



## SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT WELCOMES ADAM FOSS FOR 5TH ANNUAL PATHS TO EMPLOYMENT



The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department welcomed Adam Foss to the Suffolk County House of Correction to address participants of the Fifth Annual "Paths to Employment" Program, a mock interview fair for incarcerated women.

Part of the Department's Women's Program Services, Paths to Employment is a mock interview fair held in conjunction with Project Place, a Department re-entry partner and leading social service agency in Boston. An impressive array of participating local employers also joined with Project Place and members of the Department for the event.

Adam Foss, the ten graduates of the program, employers and members of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department came together to celebrate the accomplishments of the program. Foss currently serves as the President and CEO of Prosecutor Impact, an organization that teaches prosecutors about alternatives to incarceration in order to improve communities and public safety.

"If our job is to increase public safety and reduce the likelihood that crime will occur in our neighborhoods, then getting people from prison to employment is something we need to focus on much more," Foss said.

Speaking to the participants of the program, Foss continued, "Today is the end of your time coming back to the system. Today is also the beginning of us working together as a community so that no one in this room has to come back here."

For ten women currently incarcerated at the Suffolk County House of Correction, the mock job interview fair was a significant step in their preparation for life on the outside. As part of a greater plan to reduce recidivism, prior to release, women receive job readiness and life skills instruction.

With Project Place, the Department offered courses in resume writing, job training, and interviewing skills. Participants put these skills into practice by sitting with employers who volunteered to interview inmates and provide important critiques to give them a better chance at landing a job once released. These participating "C.O.R.I.-friendly" employers were matched with the interests of each individual woman in the program for interviews.

The women participated in two rounds of interviews with two individual employers, followed by an informal debrief for tips on their next interviews.

Offering final words of encouragement, Foss closed by saying, "Thank you for letting me be here with you today and congratulations to the wonderful women in front of me for everything that it took for you to be here."





# Val Harris

## Employee Profile

**E**dwin Valentino Harris, better known as “Val” is in the midst of celebrating his 10th year working with the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department (SCSD).

As the Department’s Workforce Development Manager, Val Harris is primarily responsible for seeking out employment opportunities for incarcerated men and women at the Suffolk County House of Correction.

Harris initially came into the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department in 2007 as a contract employee for the Dorchester Bay Economic Corporation as a case manager for the Boston Re-Entry Initiative (BRI). After some years working with the BRI, Harris officially joined the Department as a case manager before being promoted to his current role.

“I always knew that I wanted to work serving people, but I just never knew in what capacity exactly,” said Harris. “While I was working with

Dorchester Bay Economic Corporation I was a coordinator for re-entry programs and that entailed me coming into the House of Correction. At times, my clients were sent to the Suffolk County Jail so I would also head over there to work with them as well. After working with them for 7 years, I took a leap of faith and here I am today.”

As the Workforce Development Manager, Val Harris spends a significant amount of time in the community speaking with employers, talking to them about giving a second chance to incarcerated individuals seeking the opportunity to work and continue improving themselves.

“They may have a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information), but they are willing to change and want to be employed,” Harris said.

Reflecting on his motivation behind finding meaningful employment for the formerly incarcerated, Harris

stated, “ Everyone has someone in their life who needs help and an opportunity. If you had a family member who was incarcerated you would want for someone to be there for them and to help them. This is why I do this work and it’s much more than a job for me, it’s a ministry.”



# BOSTON REENTRY INITIATIVE PREPARES INMATES FOR RELEASE, FUTURE SUCCESS

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure – if you invest in the individual now, you can help them to achieve success while preventing them from being a liability to the Commonwealth in the future,” said True-See Allah, Assistant Deputy Superintendent (ADS) and Director of Re-Integration for the Suffolk County House of Correction.

At the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department, one of our central missions is to provide the kinds of programming and opportunities that can help currently incarcerated men and women to reenter our communities in better standing as contributing citizens. A common refrain often heard spoken by Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins is emblematic of the Department’s modern focus on corrections: “How do we want people in our care and custody to return to their communities? Do we want them to return home the same as they were when they came in, worse than when they came in, or better than they were when they came in?”

With the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department releasing more than 3,000 inmates from the House of Correction and more than 13,000 detainees from the Suffolk County Jail annually, the Department’s coordinated continuum of treatment and reentry programming has the potential to greatly increase public safety.

Launched in 2001, the Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) currently consists of the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department, the Boston Mayor’s Office, the Boston Police Department, the Office of the Commissioner of Probation, the Massachusetts Parole Board, the Department of Correction, the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office and the U.S. Attorney’s Office.



The re-integration of individuals into their communities presents its share of challenges and the Department works diligently to return incarcerated individuals to their neighborhoods ready for success through the Boston Reentry Initiative. The BRI is a multi-faceted community partnership that focuses on an offender population that has prior histories with gang violence and/or who are gang identified and affiliated. Through the identification of impact players who negatively affect their communities, the Boston Reentry Initiative provides reentry services to those people who pose the greatest risk to public safety in an effort to reduce violence throughout the Greater Boston area.

“We at the Department really believe that if we focus on programming and provide impact players with an extra level of advocacy, we can lower the chances that they will come back once they are released,” said ADS Allah.

The BRI achieves this goal with a focus on mentoring, information sharing, treating addiction and providing employment opportunities for inmates

after release. While offenders are still incarcerated at the House of Correction, a panel comprised of the various partner agencies comes together to meet with them to discuss issues that may affect a successful transition back to their communities.

“We are working to help put individuals on first base,” said ADS Allah. “Whether it be finding someone a halfway house placement, their first job, or first hospital appointment, we want to help connect the dots for what it is that most people need to succeed when coming out.”

Recent research relating to incarcerated individuals who are returning to their communities demonstrates that the first 72 hours post-release are crucial in terms of determining whether or not they will re-offend. From 2013-2014, 146 individuals participated in the BRI panel and more than 54% of the men selected who were deemed to be 100% likely to reoffend have remained arrest free or have arrests on minor charges.

For more information on the Boston Reentry Initiative visit our website at: [www.scsdma.org](http://www.scsdma.org).

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Three women currently incarcerated at the Suffolk County House of Correction who are enrolled in the Department's Women's Programming sat down to share their experiences as participants in the Paths to Employment Program. The women also expressed their hopes and fears about returning to their communities as well as their plans for life beyond incarceration.

The Paths to Employment (PTE) Program was created as part of the Women's Programming Division to provide a focus on job readiness by providing real-time interviewing situations with actual employers who visit the House of Correction to sit with women in the program. You can read more about PTE on page 3.

To protect the privacy of the individuals interviewed for this story, only their initials are provided below.



What is the best advice that you received during the program?

**JV**

"The best advice I got throughout the program was to focus on the future. Even though this is a very low point for me coming to jail as a newly convicted felon for the first time, I have to move forward. I need to see this experience, not so much as an obstacle, but as a building block for me to move forward. There is an opportunity to grow from this and to look forward in a positive way."

**TA**

"The best advice I was given was to just strive for what you want and to keep going, and never give up. There were a few days where I thought to myself 'Oh no, not again!' This changed when I went to class and just did what I had to do and kept going. It was good for me to have guidance...it's just a really good program and I loved it. It was really powerful stuff."

What makes you most excited about returning back home?

**JV**

"I am really looking forward to seeing my family, establishing a routine, being free and just the freedom that I will get back."

**TA**

"I'm most excited for the new adventures I'm going to have. Starting my life over is really exciting. I've never been so motivated and that's how I know that I've changed."

**JB**

"When I am released I won't have to wait to do a visit every other week and I can be out there with my family and kids. My family still comes up and we have kept in communication with each other, but I know it's been very hard for them."

What do you want employers to know about you?

**JV**

"I want employers to know that I'm interested in rejoining the workforce and working in an office behind the scenes or doing customer service and just keeping businesses flowing."

**TA**

"I was actually hired by both of my mock interviews and am working on the housing piece now. Housing really is the biggest thing for me right now. I need a change and I want to start new."

**JB**

"I want employers to know that I'm a hard worker and I want to be with a company that I can grow with, not just a temporary job with no opportunity. I am really looking for a job that I can grow with that is long term."



Are you anxious or nervous about leaving the House of Correction and returning to the community?

**JV**

"Yes, I am absolutely anxious and nervous."

**TA**

"I'm not nervous at all. I am looking forward to the future."

**JB**

"I am...I am very anxious about being released. I think that meditation would really help. It's been a long time...I've been here for the last two years."

# AROUND SUFFOLK COUNTY

## Members of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Graduate from New England Law Enforcement Training Center

Suffolk County Sheriff's Department (SCSD) Deputies Malcolm Wynn and Sean Clark, Sr. graduated the New England Law Enforcement Training Center's Class 2016-05 for Reserve Intermittent Recruit Officers held at Bunker Hill Community College. Representing the SCSD onstage was Assistant Deputy Superintendent and Supervisor of Training Jose Mojica. CFO and Director of Financial Services for the SCSD Dan Martini was also in attendance as the proud father of graduate Daniel Martini.



## Sheriff Tompkins Joins MassINC for Annual Criminal Justice Reform Policy Summit

Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins and Suffolk County Sheriff's Department House of Correction Superintendent Yolanda Smith recently joined MassINC for their Annual Criminal Justice Reform Coalition Policy Summit. Sheriff Tompkins and Superintendent Smith took part on separate panels for this year's theme of "Finding Common Ground: Moving comprehensive criminal justice reform to the top of the legislative agenda," along with several other experts from the field of law and criminal justice.



## Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins Visits Northeastern University Law School

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins spoke to students of Northeastern Law School as a guest of Professor Deborah Ramirez during her "Race, Justice and Reform" class. Sheriff Tompkins urged class attendees to continue to contribute to the robust debate about corrections and how the criminal justice system deals with the continuum of care. Sheriff Tompkins also provided in-depth information about the population's, demographics and trends in corrections, and how to address some of the systemic issues that exist.





## COMMON GROUND

*NEWSLETTER*

SANDY ZAMOR CALIXTE - CHIEF  
COLLEEN FONSECA - EDITOR  
PETER VAN DELFT - EDITOR  
DAVID HILL - PHOTOGRAPHER  
VONEL LAMOUR - DESIGNER

## SHERIFF STEVEN W. TOMPKINS

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

PHONE. 617-704-6688

FAX. 617-704-6750

VISIT US ONLINE

[WWW.SCSDMA.ORG](http://WWW.SCSDMA.ORG)