

September 2, 2020

Dear New Beginnings-Next Step Community,

Just a quick note to thank you for your past support of our efforts to fight recidivism here in the state of Delaware. At NBNS we believe that change begins with relationships, and, above all, those relationships require trust. So, when you tell someone you've "got their back", you have to be willing to back up your words.

NBNS does this in the form of transitional assistance we provide for returning citizens during the first year of reentry. I know from years of experience that the grocery store gift-cards and the bus passes have been providing each week have been the difference between an individual staying on a scary new path towards freedom, or making a couple quick phone calls and going back to comfortable, old and ultimately destructive patterns of behavior. In this way, your contributions to New Beginnings-Next Step continue to have a direct and positive effect. They literally change lives.

I guess when you do something right, folks start to notice, and I've been heartened by the way that news of New Beginnings-Next Step's success has been getting around. In fact, in the weeks before the pandemic, we received permission from Delaware's Commissioner of Corrections, Claire DeMatteis and the Chief of the Bureau of Prisons, Shane Troxler, to begin the process of establishing New Beginnings groups downstate in Delaware's two remaining level five correctional facilities. And, for the first time, I was able to get a returning citizen, a man I worked with while he was incarcerated at Gander Hill, approved as a volunteer facilitator for our upcoming group at the Sussex County Correctional Institution. My dream has always been that one day down the road our prison groups might actually be run by men and women who have served time themselves. The approval of a returning citizen member of NBNS to go into the facility in Georgetown with me each week was a huge – and long resisted – first step towards realizing that vision. This process – and all our in-prison work – have been put on hold temporarily due to COVID-19. However, we have continued to meet with our returning citizens via zoom, and have recently begun weekly (masked and socially distanced) in-person meetings again at St. Francis Hospital in Wilmington.

Incorporating an online component into our group work has been one of the few silver linings of the lockdown period, and will be something we will continue doing even after the current health crisis abates, as it allows us to continue to work with members – including one who currently resides in Tennessee – who could not otherwise attend our meetings. Despite the obvious challenges in the past five months, our NBNS volunteers have tried to maintain and nurture strong relationships with our members by doing more one-on-one phone work. I've also done some writing and worked with my board to come up with a new pamphlet that explains who we are and what we're about. I'll attach it with this email. I'm also attaching a link to an article I was asked to write for the International Leadership Association about a concert I gave at the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution: <https://intersections.ilamembers.org/member-benefit-access/interface/grassroots-leadership/the-song-i-didnt-play-john-flynn929>

None of this – or what I believe will come next as we grow as an organization – would be possible without your kindness and generosity, and I consider each of you a part of the New Beginning-Next Step family. Thank you so much!

May God bless and keep you safe.

Much love,

John