

Two Roads

Stories and Service

Written by and for the Men and Women of
the Illinois Department of Corrections



TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SERVICE ISSUE

- 3 Mission
- 5 Letter from the Publisher
- 6 Letter from the Editor
- 7 Good Medicine for a Hardened Heart
- 8 Service
- 9 Leading by Example
- 11 Renewed State of Mind
- 13 SSC
- 15 Service Compensation
- 18 Being a Good Neighbor
- 23 Paving the Road-Jane Addams
- 24 Redemption
- 26 Two Roads Projects
- 27 Two Roads Team



17 Volunteerism



20 New Life



21 Day One

Mission

Thank you for taking the time to read our E-Zine. We are Kewanee LSRC's Two Roads Restorative Justice program . Our E-Zine is our voice. Our mission statement reads in part "... we are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems as servant leaders and agents of change. Using connecting tools such as stories and service, we will build the road that brings us together to conquer many of our societal ills such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration." We are blessed to share our message of positive change, and do our small part in this monumental task of criminal justice reform.

Our newsletter focuses on three phases; rehabilitation, restoration and re-entry. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration.

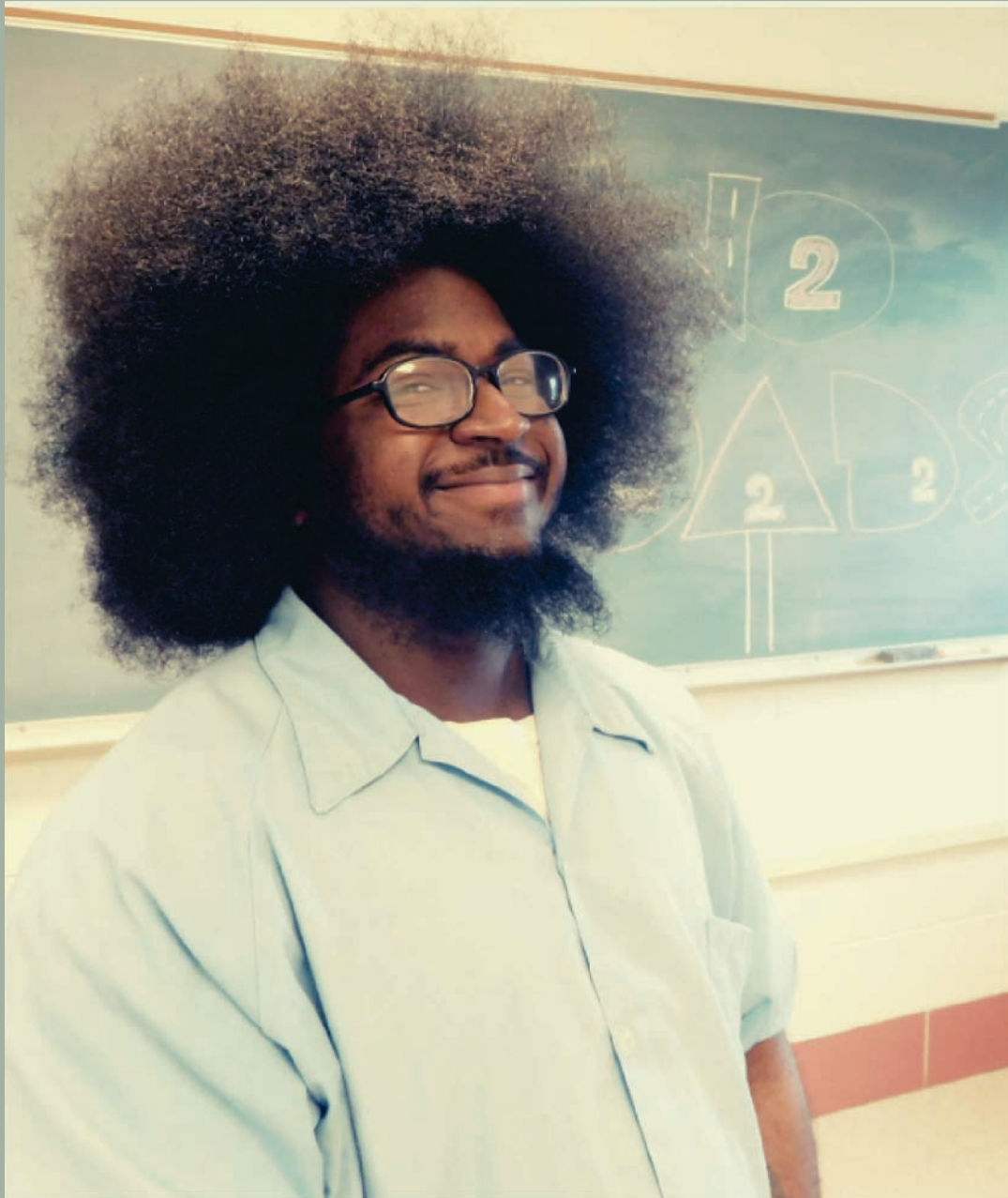
Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration. Restoration reflects the refined version of one's self we become during our incarceration. Our restored self seeks service, feels called to give something of worth to the world. Finally, re-entry. As we re-enter the world we begin our new and more productive life in the free world.

We are Two Roads, and we are becoming a valuable resource for our readers. We will serve you by sharing a plethora of information, entertainment, and resources suited to meet your needs.

Join our movement.

Two Roads Editorial Board

"Anyone can slay a dragon, he told me, but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. That's what takes a real hero."
-Brian Andreas



Charles Chew
Multi-Media Department Co-Chair
Technology and Creative Design

Publisher's Letter

Jim Estes

Plotinus said, "Man is poised midway between gods and the beasts." He meant to explore a sort of sliding scale between our best and worst self.

I believe that, when we choose to serve, our place on this scale slides upward toward our best self.

Volume 3 of our Two Roads Magazine explores the restorative value of service for the men in our prison as they choose to give of themselves for someone else.

Service transforms and, when we serve, we help someone else and learn we have something of value to give the world. It's hard to go back to the old ways of thinking once we serve. We set what we thought were our self interests aside and realize we kinda love this new, giving version of ourselves.

We get at least as much as we gave.

For this issue we'll explore reflections on service from 14 men and one woman. 12 of whom are incarcerated, The other three consist of a teacher, a psychologist and a professional speaker.

We introduce a new feature of our magazine, chapter 1 of a serialized novel we call "Day 1". This novel will trace the paths (and choices) of three fictional young men-Deon (Devious), Iam (Gucci) and Aaron as they navigate the challenges of incarceration. Our first chapter was written by Dionisio Reyes, winner of a fierce competitive writing challenge.

For each new episode of our e-zine there'll be a new competition for authorship of the next chapter in our serialized novel.

We've attached a schematic of Two Road's Programs on the last page of the e-zine and, well, there's a lot. Lots of people trying to serve through good works and storytelling.

This makes me think.

What is Two Roads?

When people ask me to define Two Roads, I echo our Mission Statement, which explores ways in which to operationalize restorative justice but I think the best explanation is that we're a group of people trying to become...

I love the word become. It suggests you were once something else and are evolving into something new. If you're serving, then you are evolving into something that's pretty great. You are becoming... I'm a pretty lucky guy as I get to work with some people that did bad stuff a long time ago and are now, through trial and with an undefeated spirit becoming great.



I hope some of their work rubs off on me because I want to become too...

Editor's Letter

Ricky Hamilton

It is my great honor to introduce this issue of Two Roads, focused on a theme I believe is inherently important to a person's continual self-development. Service.

Why is service so important? Well, for me service is the greatest manifestation of one's mind, body and spirit. In Hebrew the word most people translate as worship (avode) actually translates as "to work for, toil for or labor for". So, one's worship reflects what a person does and not simply the name one calls upon during prostration. Therefore, as individuals in need of a second chance it is inherent that our service shows forth our renewed and restored mind. A great avenue for us to do this is by volunteering for the betterment of our community. It is for this reason Two Roads has made service and stories our identity.

This issue of the Two Roads magazine is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the potential which resides in these penal institutions. During my extensive incarceration one of the greatest and most fulfilling parts has been seeing just how many brothers I have come across who have revealed non-profit ideas and service aspirations to help build up their communities if and when given the chance. After seeing and analyzing this commonality between myself and many others over the years, I have concluded this inclination towards dedicating oneself to the restoration of one's community is a natural step in the process of rehabilitation.

This natural step is what our service issue high-lights, and the more people outside of corrections get to see who we truly are, a redeemable people, the easier it will be for the changes we all want to see come to fruition. For all of you men and women reading this I hope you draw inspiration and motivation from our stories. I know many of you may have thought you are all alone with your big ideas and dreams but Two Roads is here to tell you to keep dreaming, keep planning and eventually you will be the author of the change you envision. After all, who else but you?

In this issue we highlight many great stories of personal service as well as programs and committees that have been started in Kewanee LSRC due to the Two Roads Restorative Justice philosophy.



In our re-entry section we spotlight the Jane Addams Resource Corporation. It's our hope this information can result in your successful transition into society.

As you read this I would like for you to remember we are in a unique position, for as rehabilitated men and women we carry the responsibility to give back to our communities, not simply because we should but because who but us? Who but us understands the problems our communities face because it was us that were integral to many of its roots. Who but us, because who can care more about us than us? Or who should? Therefore please take heed to this issue of our E-Zine, Manifest your vision.

Become the change you wish to see... All the best...
Ricky Hamilton
Two Roads President/Editor-In-Chief

Good Medicine for a Hardened Heart

Lloyd M. Wickliffe Jr.

Empathy is a characteristic often confused with sympathy. This error may exist because both words require an individual to use their feelings for the sake of understanding another's. Sympathy, while not a bad emotion is often frowned upon because it invokes a sense of pity toward the recipient. While empathy allows an individual to remain empowered and understood. Simply put, empathy is the ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes for a moment to understand their situation.

During my early twenties I had an opportunity to work with people diagnosed with developmental disabilities. I was employed in what are known as Community Integrated Living Arrangements (C.I.L.A) homes. Working with this special group of people truly allowed me to soften my heart and be grateful to Allah for allowing me to be of sound mind. There were times I worked with adults who could not perform simple tasks. I learned there are skills we take for granted like being able to communicate a need, tying shoes, bathing or dressing ourselves.

That experience transferred over during my incarceration when I worked in H.C.U at Big Muddy. There I was introduced to another possible reality, that of being becoming sick and or growing old in the I.D.O.C. I worked in Healthcare and Hospice. My job only called for me to assist the staff with simple things like feeding and linen changes. However, my inmate co-workers and I went above and beyond our duties. We all understood that one of us or our loved ones could one day be restricted to a healthcare unit for the remainder of ours or their lives. That thought compelled us to act and treat those men as we ourselves would want to be treated if it were us. The same applies to anyone like me that has had an opportunity to volunteer with hospice. It is a humbling experience to try and comfort someone during their last hours of life away from the love of family and friends.

Empathy is a human characteristic that allows us to connect with one another. It allows people to see and understand from a different perspective. I believe empathy and service to others are good medicine for a hardened heart.



Service

Edward Beal

What is service? Or, more importantly, how does someone serve? One of the most fascinating things I have realized since I became an adult is the fact that people have trouble offering up their services. Why is this? Surely we all recognize the importance of assistance. And since this is so, why must we first wait until someone is in dire need of assistance before we offer it? This in my opinion is the regression of humanity.

If a child was in need and we neglected to help, then the person who refused or withheld help would be ostracized in their community. They would be labeled inhumane and not fit to be a member of society.

But what of those who are supposed to serve and don't? What about our lawyers, doctors, and firemen? I would argue the service to humanity is much more extensive than these professions! Surely our teachers, cooks, and communities must also carry the burden of servants.

I believe that to define whether or not you are or are not a true servant you must first define what it means to serve. The dictionary defines service as: any work done or action performed for the benefit of another; or a useful work that does not produce a material object. This places humanity in a conundrum, how is one supposed to work for society but not reap the rewards of their work? I mean even if their only payment is the joy and satisfaction of seeing others happy isn't that still self gain? And what of those who serve or say they serve only their God? Do they do this as ritual or are they doing this as a way to avoid criticism for all the wrong that they have done? When we offer our service is it really as a true servant or is there some other ulterior motive?

Before this question can be answered one must remember that a true servant is one who serves as a devotee to a cause, community or person. Now in light of these terms being clearly defined, ask yourself, are you truly a servant? And if so, what or whom do you serve? It is with these two questions in mind that I take account of my life and my relationships. Who do I serve? But more importantly why? After asking myself these questions I came to this conclusion: those I serve I help sincerely. I serve them because I love them. Not in the Greek sense of the word(s) such as Agape -the love that one Christian has for another, or Eros-love of a sexual nature, or even Philadelphia - love that one has for his/her brother, not their biological brother but their brother in philosophy or circumstance.

No, I serve with the love any mother has for their young, that the Heavenly Father offers all of his children, that only one who truly cares can and is willing to provide. I am well aware of the fact many do not know who, what, or why they serve. That does not make them a bad person. But, unfortunately it does force them to forgo the pleasure of the reciprocity of service and love.



Leading By Example

Dylan Metzger

My grandfather, father and brother are all combat veterans, so when I hear the word service I instinctively think of the military. Our veteran's contributions epitomize volunteerism and service.

That's why I'm so proud to write about two very talented artists and highlight some of their art. Like me, they have a soft spot for our military veterans. While not veterans themselves, Tony Castillo and William Serrano have exemplified service since arriving at Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center. Both men have logged over two thousand hours of volunteer service.

A central focus of Two Roads is restorative justice. For those of you who don't know, restorative justice involves the belief that when you commit a crime you incur a debt to society that needs to be repaid in some way.

As members of Two Roads we make our amends through giving back to others. Our goal is to transform ourselves from the wayward men we were when we came to prison into productive members of society. Through Two Roads some of us produce content like this magazine, our podcasts or our juvenile justice program where we reach out to at-risk juveniles.

Others volunteer through institutional programs like our garden that raises thousands of pounds of food for a local food bank, the hospice program that comforts terminal inmates facing their last days, or the dozens of art projects the art room undertake every year. We believe that through giving back we can be redeemed. Both Tony and Will personify the core principals of Two Roads.

Tony and Will are regular fixtures at in the Kewanee art room who make the time to help young or inexperienced artists like myself. They both played a major role in painting soothing wilderness landscapes to help comfort the sickly patients in hospice who are facing their last days. Tony and Will also helped draw and paint dozens of giant Christmas decorations that were placed in a local park for families to appreciate and enjoy. Their artistic murals help de-institutionalize our visiting room and the countless walls around Kewanee.

The art we are highlighting are the meticulously detailed flag retirement boxes these men have helped create. They were placed at area Post Offices and VFW Halls so local residents can turn in aging or damaged flags for respectful disposal. The beautiful artwork includes iconic battle scenes and various military decorations and emblems. Tony also made a beautiful over-sized card on which many of us wrote personal messages of appreciation and thanks for local residents of a veteran's home. All of us who helped also made individualized holiday decorations to go along with the cards.

My own humble attempts at writing and art are inspired by these two men and all the other men and women across the state who refuse to allow the circumstances of their incarceration to limit what they have to offer the world.



Hopefully our stories and pictures highlight the potential every institution has to facilitate worthy contributions to the community at large. It is our hope at Two Roads that one day all of the talented men and women incarcerated across the state will have the opportunity to use their many gifts to give back to society in some small way.

Flag Box Project

Kewanee LSRC



Will Serrano

Renewed State of Mind for Service

Walter Brown

Those who read this introduction may have found similar struggles through the cycle of life's perpetuating fates. Those inquiring few who finish this story are those who desire more in life. When we look in a mirror, we don't stare back blank faced. We have learned to accept our imperfections, and know that to discover our true identity there must be an authentic examination of one's self. The image in the mirror is not defined by our old reflection, but what's beneath our skin in our heart and mind.

From age 17 through 40, I experienced several trips to the department of corrections and have always asked myself upon return, "How can I support my family and stay clear of activities which will bring me back?" Many individuals through my incarceration were inspired to succeed upon returning back into society. However, my past reality has found that upon reoffending the success I had obtained lacked being rooted within virtuous means. Those who make conscious choices from because of a lack of moral priority are not victims of recidivism. Over the last two decades I've sought education, employment, and lifestyle change, and fallen short with multiple incarcerations and no 401K. When I examined my life's educational and employment experiences, it gave me encouragement. I understood I was teachable, motivated, and disciplined myself to pursue higher learning to acquire skills for success.

Unfortunately, my past lifestyle has contributed to my incarcerations. Today, for me to acquire success I must make a change in my life by examining and aligning the priorities of my inner intentions.

In June of 2017, my incarceration at Pinckneyville C.C. allowed me time to reflect on my life while locked down within my cells 18hrs in and 6hrs out. My daughter's smile would repeatedly illuminate my thoughts. As I recalled the day I lost my trial, I was saddened by the thought of not seeing my 3 week old daughter. The stresses from knowing I was forced to neglect responsibilities from the choice of my own indiscretion weighed heavy on my soul. It began to plague and affect my mental health. Although, that day was clear it was sunny and hot with a cool breeze. The sound of the birds from the cracked cell window filled the void. Living within my double bunk-bathroom I turned to the window and could hear my cellmate flush the toilet. The lunch line doors rolled and we knew it would close if you missed posting your body on the other side of the door. I always had a habit of being conscious for new information, and that day was no different. There was a new flier posted on the board for an essay entry to transfer to "Kewanee", an IDOC site. As explained, it offered unique expectations which differ from other facilities and its description gave me pause.

Today the memory of that day is still seared in my conscience. At a recent Two Roads meeting with a few prominent IDOC representatives I was asked, "What were my thoughts when I first observed Kewanee entrance flier, as we initially debated over if anyone will apply?" When it was my turn to answer the question I felt the same chill over my arm and a grind from anxiety within my stomach. I closed my eyes, inhaled, and opened them with a feeling of peace as I said, "For me the [Kewanee] flier posed a reflection for what my life desired for the transition from incarceration into a released, sustained, and successful lifestyle (RSSL). The flier allowed me to look into the mirror, and see myself for more than

Renewed State of Mind for Service

my failed life's testimony. I saw responsibility, accountability, and a chance to build goodwill from within IDOC. I knew during the time I was attempting this change is when I would be most susceptible to adopting a successful lifestyle. I knew Kewanee was the perfect place for me.”

Today, I'm earnestly striving to adjust my moral compass to define my core character. I have allowed this incarceration at Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center (KLSRC) to create a stable platform for my success through Two Roads Special Service Committee (SSC). The function of SSC is for the community of Kewanee LSRC to further the development of participants' re-entry habits through service.

Collectively we have, at Kewanee, a unique opportunity to engage in the positive evolution of ourselves by having the space and opportunity for character building experiences.

Some of the volunteer activities I have participated in are: Kewanee Garden helper, City of Kewanee-Holiday Display, Day with Dads Events, and Veterans appreciation card signing (Special Project). Through these humble activities we seek to organize participants' history of service to create the “Portfolio of Good Will”. The portfolio, when properly articulated and displayed, can be a positive re-entry tool for things such as: Employment history, referrals for community social agencies, Record of hours for on the job experience, family/custody issues, Records of positive deeds advocating for future programs (education, parole, and other outside IDOC programs). Participants for service here at KLSRC can utilize the student folder to store their resume of service upon release. My role here has presented a guide map for the purpose and meaning of my life. My hope is for others to renew their state of mind for service and to acquire a sustained and successful lifestyle.



SSC Volunteerism

Penny Rowan

Why do people volunteer? Is it a cause close to their heart? Do they like others to look at them and be impressed by their good deeds? Do they get warm fuzzies from helping other people? It doesn't really matter, to be honest. Volunteers give a pull up to those who are down on their luck in the moment. It doesn't have to be through an organized action; it can be as simple as mowing your neighbor's lawn when they're busy or seeing a kid wipe out on his bike and stopping to help him up.

Truly, volunteerism is more a way of life than a single activity. The types of people who give of themselves in the service of others are the people who look beyond themselves and recognize they are participants in a community. It's not about recognition or bringing glory to oneself; it's about strengthening the bond with society.

Luke 12:48 states, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." God has blessed me with abundant intelligence, time, compassion and empathy. To keep these gifts for myself would be selfish. He has given me much and it is my duty to utilize these to help others. That I can strengthen my community in the process is a bonus; that I get to meet and know some pretty amazing people is an advantage as well. It's true that in giving we receive, and my cup is stays pretty full.

I started volunteering years ago simply because a friend asked me to help out. What I found then, and still find now, is that I get as much joy and satisfaction from my volunteering as those I'm trying to help. It is not as selfless as it seems from the outside looking in. I have met some of the most genuine people I know through giving of my time; I've made some of my best friends while volunteering in some capacity; while it sounds trite, I get more than I give.

What special gifts do you have to give? Are you a good teacher who could help a child with understanding math better? Are you good with your hands and could fix the step leading to your neighbor's porch? Are you a master of all things edible and could cook meals at a local shelter? Find your gift and use it to put some positive out there in the world.

Two Roads recently introduced its Special Service Committee (SSC), which gives guys a chance to track the service hours they put in at the facility. Why does that matter? For our purposes, we like to track the hours of service to roll them into the Portfolio of Goodwill that we create for ourselves before leaving. We use the data to show we've put sweat and effort behind our decision to change our ways. We walk the walk.

SSC Volunteerism

In addition, we use that information to help formulate our new goal statement for growth at Kewanee (90 Day Challenge). It's voluntary, but it's a great way to gauge the progress we've made in our time here, and to look for ways to bridge the gap into community volunteerism.

Looking ahead, we hope to present the guys with specific opportunities for volunteer service, beyond what they already do. Soon we want to roll out our Spoken Word Café, peer led instruction in multi-media audio and visual, foreign language, sign language, and basic computer coding. We want to work with the local churches and service organizations to find a way to give directly back to this community. We've discussed building raised beds for placement in various communities. We want to help with set up and repair of Day with Dads games and activities. We hope to facilitate fathers reaching out to their children and children's teachers for parent conferences.

We are full of ideas, and all, naturally, have to follow the path of permissions through the chain of command, but we stand ready to implement our vision as we are allowed. Keep an eye out for more information, and plan to join us!

Penny Rowan

Faculty Advisor, SSC Department



L to R: Lloyd Wickliffe, Walter Brown, Lamar Whitehead, Marchello Donaldson

Service Compensation

Ammar Suleiman

Seldom does one think of service in a selfless light. I think of service as a job being done for which one is compensated. But service has many different definitions; iemployment, armed forces, maintenance, installation, duties, acts of devotion to God, and more. The definition I refer to is, “an act of assistance or benefit to others.” Selflessness. For this reason it's astonishing for me to see compensation for selfless service. And that is what this story is about.

When I first went to Centralia C.C. in 2014 I signed up for Islamic service. There were many brothers with a wealth of knowledge eager to share with anyone willing to learn. As I was born and raised Muslim many brothers assumed I already had this “wealth of knowledge” or somehow knew certain practices they didn't. This was false. I learned so much from being around those brothers and attending Jumuaa and Talim services (Islamic Friday service and Islamic Studies.) Brothers began asking me questions in regard to this way of life or the Deen and in assisting with the services.

At first I was very reluctant but then learned that as a Muslim one is not to withhold knowledge, especially when someone is asking you for it, even if it is very limited. So I began assisting brothers with what I could.. I did this as an act of service to my fellow brother. But what it did for me was the compensation.What that did for me was force me to study, to learn more. It made me a student of knowledge. It opened my eyes to so many different fields of study, so many different faiths, and so many beliefs. I learned that the more I knew the more I realized I know nothing. It strengthened my faith. I realized Islam doesn't ask for blind followers, but for people to bear witness based on logic and reason. I became a student of comparative religion. I better understood my own faith by understanding other faiths. I was compensated by becoming a student of knowledge.

One of my brothers, Khalil reminded me of an old saying that I now truly understand, “It is only by giving that one can truly receive.” Sometimes a selfless act of service results in one being compensated in ways he or she did not dream of. Hence, service compensation.



“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke
and saw that life was service. I acted and
behold, service was joy.”

-Tagore



Edward Beal

Volunteerism

Marlo Clarke, Speaker

The only gift we can ever give that lasts a lifetime is our time, and our time is the most precious resource we have. Growing up in Barbados I spent my childhood trying to find ways to help others. Being a shy lad with not many social skills, I had the strong desire to have an impact on the life of others and for them to have fond memories of me.

Volunteerism is sharing our most precious resource to serve others; time. We all have that teacher or coach we remember from childhood. They believed in us when we didn't believe in ourselves. They pushed up past what we thought were our limits, and told us the four words we all love to hear, "I am proud of you".

I was once told we can give of our time, our talent, or our treasure. If you have plenty of time to dedicate to a cause that's awesome! If you have not much time to spend, but have a talent like cabinet-making or painting and you share that talent with those in need that is volunteerism, too. If you have excess resources and want to share your treasure, that too is a form of volunteerism. Giving selflessly with no thought of thanks or future reward is a very rewarding feeling.

Volunteerism in my life has meant spending time with people who seek better for themselves and sharing with them stories of struggle, passion, and incremental success. I have given speeches in schools, churches, conferences and correctional facilities.

In facilities I see hundreds of men and women with ethos of knowledge accumulated over many years of dedicated reading, curiosity and deep, silent thought. I see productive citizens capable of changing the world. They will change the world one young person and one conversation at a time.

The value of a conversation you can have with a young person cannot be over stated. The simple fact that you take your most precious resource, time, to sit with them, ask them how their day is going, ask them about their choices, and share with them your story and the lessons you learned to live a good life.

In closing, our most precious resource is our time. BUT it is also the lessons we have learned from the lives we have lived. Those are our treasures. You have a treasure to share. Do not discount how valuable your story is, and the tremendous impact you will have on the world.

Through volunteerism you can change the world, and I know you will.
And for that, I am proud of you, ladies and gentlemen

Acts of Volunteerism

J. Price

What is service? Or, more importantly, how does someone serve?

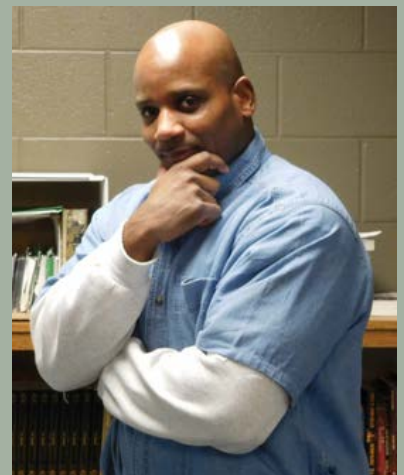
When I think about volunteering, it's an act of kindness that's enduring—when I think about work, it's not a chore if it's something you enjoy doing. How often do we truly help those in need—not with mere words but with actions and deeds?

We often move through life oblivious and mindless—not aware we can enhance the quality of life for someone with a simple act of kindness. Showing someone the compassion that we were once shown—looking beyond ourselves to focus on someone with struggles deeper than our own. Charitable people make this world a better place—they possess the quality of moving through life with elegance and grace. This is a world of the have and have-nots, a major disparity—so there are a million twists and turns on the way to prosperity.

There are still good people in this world, it's not an illusion—what goes around comes around is a universal law, yet to be disproven. All facts of life are supported by proof—words spoken in love can heal a broken heart, that's the honest to God truth. There are people in Nursing Homes looking for a smile and inspiration—there are people in Hospitals looking for encouragement and motivation—there are people in Shelters looking for guidance and education. Very often the good deeds of people are not recorded—but good people never do things to be compensated or rewarded. They do it from the heart with no hidden agendas or gimmicks-- they are genuine and 100% authentic. They don't put emphasis on material possessions or treasures—and for that reason they are blessed beyond measure. There are so many problems in the world that persist—and one way of dealing with them is not to pretend they don't exist. We must confront the issues that are ailing our communities.

The world is filled with less fortunate people we choose to ignore—treating others how you want to be treated is a golden rule very few choose to explore. Volunteering can be foreign or domestic, local or abroad—it's all about dedicated individuals playing their part. There is no other service that garners this passion—there is no other cause that gives this satisfaction. We all have had clothes we no longer wore or food we would simply discard-- both of these things mean so much to a person whose life was just torn apart.

You can be a person high up on your pinnacle of success—then in an instant be a person in financial distress. You can lose it all by circumstance or by chance-- so it's important not to overlook the people of lower stature looking to advance. If you have suffered the bad bruise of stinginess then seek healing—you do that by giving, I promise there is no better feeling. Volunteering your time isn't something someone should earn—it's a form of service that's given freely without expecting anything in return. Let's volunteer today people!



New Life

Richard Piczello

At the age of 33, I came to prison a broken child with a broken past. I'll tell you that I am a man today, but it's an ongoing process and never perfection. I'd spent my life doing everything I could to be accepted. I was loyal to a gang for 23 years, abused drugs and alcohol for 18 years, and tried to be a father and a husband for 14 of those years and failed miserably.

I was arrested in the summer of 2010 for a gang-related shooting in which a young man was left paralyzed. I pled guilty to the crime I committed and received a 15 year sentence to be served at 85%. That's when my process began. I lost everything and everyone. I came to the end of self. I was betrayed by the gang I was so loyal to, and I made a decision to drop my flags, leave the gang life and seek God's purpose for my life. My children's mother divorced me after 14 years and I don't blame her. My relationship with my 3 daughters has been strained. I've take full responsibility for my actions and accept the consequences. Since the beginning of my incarceration I've been involved in any programs I could find to help me become a better man, I have grown mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

After 9 years in prison I am grateful for my true family. Bridges once burned are being rebuilt. Relationships that were lost are being reconciled,. It took me a long time to forgive myself, but by the grace of God I've been able to because I'm a new man and not the broken child I was then. In June of 2018 I received a major blessing in my life. I was transferred to Kewanee life skills re-entry center. I am so grateful to be here, they want me to succeed and they see that I have worth.

Recently me and another brother were talking which led me to think about the many others currently on the same path as I was - which is why I came up with an idea to start a book club called 'Breaking Point'. The idea was birthed from a powerful book published by DePaul University called 'How long will I cry?/voices of youth violence'. Excerpt from the forward: in 2011 and 2012, while more than 900 people were being murdered on the streets of Chicago, creative writing students from DePaul University fanned out all over the city to interview people whose lives have been changed forever by the bloodshed. The result is this extraordinary and eye-opening book. Told by real people in their own words, the stories are at turns harrowing, heartbreaking and full of hope. This book has deep issues that a lot of violent offenders need to hear, such as gang intervention, violence prevention and victim awareness.

Thanks to Mr. Estes, Mr. Kuster and AWP Parrack for encouraging us and approving this journey. I do the best I can now to give back to my fellow brothers by telling my story and sharing my experience, strength and hope. I'm a vessel being used to change lives. And none of this can be done without love. I love these brothers, I love my family, I love my city, I love my community and now.....I love myself. This is my service.

I was part of the problem and now I will be part of the solution. My wife (yup, we're back together) needs a strong husband and my daughters need a loving father and that's what they will have, they deserve it. I thank God I came to prison: my life was saved, and I am now dedicated to serving those who are without help for themselves. Been there, done that and I'm still here with another chance at life. Remember: if it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you. Peace.

Day One

Dionisio Reyes

Dion

Kesssssss! The bus came to a screeching halt as it neared the giant barbed-wire fence. The bus didn't have any windows to stare out of, except for the windshield at the front. Being seated all the way back, Dion hadn't the luxury of seeing the massive structure they approached. So many feelings aroused in that instant; fear, anxiousness, anxiety, nervousness, and so many others he hadn't even known existed till that moment. Clink clink clink clink clink clink... that was the sound the gates made as they retracted to allow the bus to roll in for inspection. This is it, he thought to himself, the moment of truth!

"Oye pai, tranqui-qui, its finna be aight! This must be your first time down, verdad?" Dion looked over his shoulder to see the short dark skinned Boricua speaking to him. "Claro que si, that obvious, huh?" he chimed back.

Dion had just turned 18 years old a few weeks back. His name was Dion Ramos, a frail looking, fair-skinned Puerto Rican cat from Chicago's Northwest side. In the neighborhood the guys called him Devious, or Devioso, due to his sneakiness and low tolerance for nonsense. He got hit with a boat-load of time for an attempted murder and an armed robbery. He'd never been to prison before. Sure he'd been arrested a few times for weed, mob action, driving with no L's and whatnot- in and out of the station in no time flat, but this was the real deal Holyfield. "Big Boy" status! "Big Boy" crimes get you "Big Boy" time, in the "Big Boy" Playpen...the Penitentiary! So it was time for Dion to put his "Big Boy" pants on and get ready to face all the adversities about to be hurled his way. The blue bird pulled up to the facility that would now become his residence for whatever amount of years it took for him to be able to transfer out of that hellhole. The internal battle had just begun.

"Don't trip papa, you finna be decent once you get nice-n-sitchie. You a plugged-thug aint you?" the dark skinned Puerto Rican asked.

"You already know! I'm one of the guys", Devious answered back. "Y tu? Que tu eres?" (And what about you, what you is?).

"Yo soy tambien (I am too). They call me Prieto," he shot back.

"They call me Devious," Dion retorted.

Hmm, I wonder what's up wit buddy. Din-nude seem kind'a off. He a lil' too happy to be hitt'in the joint. He probably a dope fiend or one of them chasers! Devious thought to himself. I aint got no time to be play'in wit buddy. Then again, I might could use this lil' bastard in the future....I gotta to keep'em close!

Aaron and lam

'How the hell did I get myself into this mess? What was I thinking?' thought the scrawny, pale white kid from Naperville, Illinois. He was unaffiliated and had no idea what he was in for.

"Hey white boy, you koo fam? You look like you 'bout to lose it!" shot this burly looking black cat to his right.

"Yeah, this is my first time in jail, and I have no idea what to expect. My name's Aaron, what's yours?"

"They call me Gucci, and this ain't jail either, this the big house" he responded. "Real Talk though, this my first time down fam, they just gave the kidd a fresh dubb!"

"Gucci" (Iam) was a young dude from Rockford Illinois. He was eighteen, and stocky from his days as a football lineman at his high school, Auburn High. He killed some dude he found out raped his older sister Vanessa, he called her Nessa.

"You mean you gotta do 20 years too?" Aaron said in a tone that sounded as if he realized he wasn't alone in this after all.

"Too...what'chu mean too? You gotta body too?" Gucci asked.

"I don't know what you mean. We all have bodies don't we?" asked Aaron surprisingly while he looked over his hands & arms.

"Nah fam, I mean yeah we all do, but not like that. Not in a literal sense. A body is a 9-1, a 1-8-7, a murder, you know? It means you killed somebody."

"Ooh, I get it. Yeah man, I messed up big time bro. I walked in on my girlfriend with my best bud. I should've just kept my cool though right? I mean, now look at me!"

"Damn bro-ski" Gucci said, "that's cold-blooded fam! What'chu do, smoke'em both?"

"Hell no! Just him. He betrayed me Gucci. I trusted him" Aaron replied.

"Newsflash, A-dawg, she betrayed you!"

This is where the story begins for these three young men, all eighteen years old, all of them facing their first day in prison, all different races and all from different areas in Illinois. Let's see how their journey through this IDOC machine unfolds while we follow their choices and stories from their first day in, till their last!

The bus rolled out of the check point and made its way through the gates and into the receiving building of Mt. Sterling's Western Institutional Correctional Center.

"Alright, everyone remain seated, someone will come around and unshackle you, and the quicker we get this done the quicker I get you off my bus" shouted one of the transport officers. Once unshackled and on the way off the bus, a lieutenant took their numbers. When everyone was accounted for, they were herded like cattle through the gates of the facility between the warehouse and the receiving buildings.

"Ahhhhhhhh! On the neeewwwww..."

"Fresh fish..."

"Damn, that white boy though!"

"Aye, what ya'll is..."

That's all you could hear beneath the pounding on the segregation cell doors on the bottom tier.

The sound was like the beating of a thousand drums.



PAVING THE ROAD

Michael Cannon

A guide for a successful transition to life in the community

Our Paving the Road articles contain useful information about a variety of resources that can assist you with your reentry into the community after incarceration.

It is a reality that adjusting to life in the free world after incarceration is a very serious affair... Let's keep it 100% REAL, making this transition isn't going to be easy. It's a fact there are many obstacles in the paths of people with criminal records. Negative social stigmas are often attached to us, and we face many legal barriers.

To effectively overcome these difficulties you must methodically plan for your future in order to give yourself the best chance to succeed.

Paving the Road offers these resources:

- Advice that can help you methodically prepare for release before you leave prison
- Useful information about how you can effectively plan your life after prison.
- A Reentry Directory that provides useful information about housing, employment, education, healthcare and more

In each edition we will spotlight a different organization throughout the state that provides services in your area that can assist with your reentry needs.

For this edition we spotlight the JANE ADDAMS RESOURCE CENTER (JARC). I interviewed the JARC Director of Training, Emily Peters, and was impressed with everything she shared with me about JARC and the great opportunities they offer any returning citizen paroling to Chicago's metropolitan area .

- There is no cost to enroll in their program.
 - 50% of JARC enrollees have criminal backgrounds.
 - The primary opportunity JARC offers is training in Manufacturing Services, CNC Machinist, Press Brake, Welding, and job placement once certification is obtained.
 - No high school diploma or GED is required with any company JARC places you with after completing their program.
 - It's noteworthy that over 90% of trainees that successfully obtain vocational certification with JARC are immediately placed with a company and the average starting pay is \$17-\$18 an hour.
 - Job placements with companies who network with JARC do not require prior job experience. Emily emphasized Trade Unions are particularly excited about Welding and the opportunity for a certified Welder to get into the Trade Union.
- JARC provides financial coaching and credit repair for enrollees.

Application Sessions

Wednesday, 9:00am- 1:45 ,
4:00pm- 8:00pm

Main Office

(2nd floor) Austin Training Center
4432 N. Ravenswood Ave
231 N. Pine Ave., Door#1
Chicago, Il. 60640

Redemption through Service

Michael Cannon

This year 2019, marks the 28th consecutive year of a nightmare for me called incarceration, and GOD-Willing, it will mark the final year of incarceration as well. It has certainly been a long, hot journey across a blazing desert. As painful as this my life has been, I've come to understand the magnitude of suffering I experienced was necessary. I have come to know first-hand the pains of my brother man and I know how to address the needs of the downtrodden.

The sentence has been a heavy price to pay. Can you imagine the amount of pain. I've experienced over 28 years? And you want to know what's worse than the suffering I have experienced? It is the suffering I inflicted on others, on those who love me, did time with me, and who I love most in this world... Worse still is losing them one by one to death before having the chance to make it up to them. This was my "soul-searching introspection" stage. I've come to consider the condition of the downtrodden and how the morality of society has deteriorated throughout the years of my incarceration. This human tragedy tugs at me in the most profound way. My desire is stoked to do my small part in this monumental human responsibility we all share.

I knew my faith in GOD would have to be strengthened to sustain me through this long, difficult period in my life that I was about to experience. As I began to transform my life spiritually, I began to earnestly work to serve our Creator through the religious principles that govern my life according to my faith (Al-Islam). This was my "spiritual transformation" stage. I've decided that the best vehicle for serving GOD through my humanitarian effort would be through a NFP/CRP (Not-For-Profit/Community Restoration Plan) organization. This is my calling in life. For the past 18 years I have been developing a plan on how I'll implement upon my release from prison. Upon arriving at KLSRC I discovered a platform which provided the missing tools needed for me to put the final touches on my NFP/CRP. This was TWO ROADS, which eventually evolved into KLSRC's Restorative Justice Program. At orientation, Assistant Warden Jennifer Parrack kept mentioning they encourage us to give back to our community in a meaningful way. I mentioned to her I've been working on a draft for a Not-For-Profit organization the past 17 years. She informed me about Two Roads and suggested I speak with the President, Ricky Hamilton. The evening after I arrived, Ms. Parrack saw me by the chapel and said, "You, come with me!" Her serious demeanor had me thinking I was in some kind of trouble, which wasn't the case. She marched me into the gym and summoned Ricky and introduced us to one another. We hit it off immediately and spoke for over an hour about Two Roads and the similar plans we both have for the establishment of our CRPs (Community Restoration Plans).

Redemption through Service

Eventually, Ricky and I ended up joining our CRP ideas together as one, and we've embarked on a life-long journey through the NFP/CRP we are establishing together. I ask you my brothers and sisters, in light of the dreadful situation our society is in which we all will one day face as we return to our communities, what will it take for you as an individual to help bring about a positive change? This is a collective responsibility we all share. We all have the ability to become social agents for positive change, to make the world a better place than the way we left it. So will leave prison a bitter or better person? Only "YOU" can answer this question. And the answer won't come in the form of words from your mouth. The answer will come in the form of the conscious choice you make and the actions of service you take!



"If you would be, do."

-Socrates



Nik Kuster, Nathan DeCoster

Two Roads

Departments and Projects



Two Roads Team



Two Roads is Michael Kendrick-Booker, Ricky Hamilton, Antonio Bowie-Rivera, Trevon Johnson, Richard Piczello, Marchello Donaldson, Douglas Taylor, Walter Brown, Ammar Suleiman, Michael "Saadiq" Cannon, Dionisio Reyes, Charles Chew, DeCarlo Arrington, Dylan Metzler, Jeffrey Chambers, Lamar Whitehead, Dennis Jordan, Lloyd Wickliffe, Jeffrey Price, Penny Rowan (Educator), Lt. Nathan DeCoster, Jeff Olson (Chief Engineer), Shannon McDermott (Counselor), Nik Kuster (Psychologist), Jennifer Parrack (AWP), Jim Estes (Psychologist)

"Never doubt that a small group of concerned,
thoughtful citizens can
change the world; indeed, it is the only thing
that ever has."

-Margaret Mead