the Stand
south side news

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Syracuse, NY
SUMMER 2018 Issue 67 FREE

PRISON TO SOCIETY

Charles Rivers helps parolees face challenges after time behind bars

Mothers work together

Single moms agree: Raising kids is tough but rewarding

blue courage

Program helps police officers cope with stress and emotions of their daily lives

Music for the youth

Joan Hillsman, a retired music supervisor, offers music lessons to kids in Syracuse

MEET CONTAINA BLACK

INSIDE | SUMMER

the Stand

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THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER 2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET SYRACUSE , NY 13205

- Cover photography by Zachary Krahmer of Charles Rivers

CALENDAR | SUMMER

What: Ol Skool Summer Love Cookout
When: 1 to 7 p.m. Saturday, July 21
Where: Thornden Park, adjoined by Ostrom Avenue, Madison Street and South Beech Street
Details: Enjoy good music with good people in one of Syracuse's most historic parks. Music is by Legendary Dj Zu and others.
Cost: Free and open to all ages
More info.: Email HipHopUnforgettableTour@gmail.com

What: 16th annual Mary Nelson School Supply Giveaway
When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 18
Where: Corner of South Salina Street and Wood Avenue
Details: Event will open with youth parade. It will include educational, health and resource vendors, as well as entertainment, games and food. Backpacks will be given to registered youth.
Cost: Free to attend. Students must register in advance to receive a backpack filled with supplies.
More info.: Visit youthdaybarbecue.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A few weeks ago I wrote a letter saying that there are two Americas, two New Yorks, and two Syracuses: one that is enjoyed by white folks, and one where black folks try to live, try to breathe. Last year in that second America, that second Syracuse, officer Vallon Smith assaulted Jabari Boykins, a black boy with special needs. Jabari was a ninth-grader at Nottingham High School when it happened, and Vallon Smith is still a School Resource Officer there. This is the second time we've caught officer Smith, on video, assaulting a black person, but in that second Syracuse it doesn't matter. Yesterday in that second Syracuse, the district attorney decided, again, not to press charges on officer Smith.

What does it mean to be a citizen, to be a human being in that second Syracuse? On a daily basis our human rights are violated. For me, two weeks ago, it was when a cop pulled me over to perform a "routine warrant check." He lied, violated my rights, and the fact that I was a lawyer did not matter. Three years ago for Maleatra Montanez, it was when officer Chester Thompson sexually assaulted her in front of her newborn, and he did not spend a night in jail, even though two other women came forward with similar stories. Two years ago for Terry Maddox, it was when officer Kelsey Francemone shot him dead, then received two awards. For Maurice Crawley, it was performing a "cop watch" when officer Smith, on video, crossed the street and assaulted him without cause. And today, for all of you, it's every moment that passes by without justice for Jabari, for Terry, for Maleatra, for Trayvon, for Rekia, for Aiyana, for Philando, and all the names you can't remember.

— Herve Comeau
Immigration pro bono coordinator
with Volunteer Lawyers Project

(This letter was submitted to The Stand on April 12. Smith is no longer at Nottingham.)

FAREWELL LETTER

So long.

After almost a decade with The Stand as its founder, I'm moving on and retiring this year from Syracuse University.

That's the way the business can be. You keep moving on. That said, I've been with The Stand longer than any other newspaper job in my 41 years in the business.

I have worked in a lot of communities over a lot of years: Jackson, Mississippi; Rochester, New York; Washington, D.C. (for USA TODAY); and I ran a community newspaper in southern Pennsylvania for a number of years before teaching at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, starting in 1999.

For a decade, I missed not having a newspaper.

So when I noticed that the South Side did not get much media coverage, and that the little it did get was about crime, The Stand was born, in March 2010. Along the way, I lightly chastised some students for not exploring the South Side, their own next-door neighborhood, and realized I hardly knew it, either.

That certainly has changed. I learned a lot about the South Side, and made some great friends there, too, particularly original board members Charles Pierce-El and Shante Harris El, along with Reggie Seigler, who recently accompanied a group from the Newhouse School on a trip to South Africa.

A lot of "good-bye" letters like this one are extended "thank yous." There's a reason for that. No one does anything without a lot of help from others.

Thank you to the board; to longtime Director Ashley Kang; to Dean Lorraine Branham and former Dean David Rubin; to all the community correspondents and guest columnists; to all the Newhouse students (graphic designers, reporters, editors and photographers) and their professors — and particularly professor Emilie Davis, who oversaw and produced all 67 print editions of The Stand in her editing class.

Shante told The Post-Standard back in February 2010, "I think the papers that are out there now basically cater to the large voice, the people in the neighborhood who are always speaking. And the smaller voices have a story, too, and we need the paper that's going to allow them to tell their stories."

We have done that. Indeed, it was our core mission. These small stories have been a big part of my story these past years.

Newspapers don't belong to their staffs; they belong to the communities they cover.

And the South Side is a big, welcoming community I now feel a part of and will remain a part of — even though I'm turning things over to Ashley and to professor Greg Munno at the Newhouse School.

Hope to see you around the neighborhood.

See you around *our* neighborhood.

Steve Davis

ON THE SIDE

REACTION TO SROs

The S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications conducted a **survey of 184 students in four Syracuse high schools** in spring 2017. Results showed that 73 percent said they knew the name of at least one officer in their school, while 20 percent did not. The survey also showed that 47 percent reported that the presence of an SRO in their school made them safer, 41 percent felt it made no difference, and 5 percent said it made them feel uneasy.

If you'd like to see all the survey results and an accompanying story, visit: theywearblue.com/youth

HOW MANY SROs?

The National Association of School Resource Officers answered this Frequently Asked Question on its website: "How many school resource officers should a school have?"

"Every school (should) have at least one carefully selected, specially trained school resource officer. It is a best practice to have one SRO per 1,000 students. A different ratio might be appropriate for some schools, depending upon factors such as campus size (including acreage and number of buildings), school climate and location, and number of non-sworn safety team members on campus."

— Source: nasro.org

> Officer Containa Black monitors the halls of the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central. | Ivana Pino, Staff Photo

OFFICER AND FRIEND

School Resource Officer finds her place as she focuses on students

By | Ivana Pino
Staff reporter

Officer Containa Black made the shift from policing the streets to monitoring hallways

A simple question marked the start of a spring school day for Officer Containa Black at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central: "OK, what's wrong?" Black had noticed that one of her students was having a bad day.

As students moved through the metal detectors, just before the first bell in the morning, Black made her rounds throughout the building, checking every last corner and stairwell and checking on most every student who walked by — sometimes more than once.

From the streets to the schools, Black's transition from being a street cop of 20 years to an SRO — a school resource officer — came about eight years ago when two of her fellow officers encouraged her to apply for the position.

"Most people become a police officer because they want to make change," Black said. "Well, I think I can make change with a young person. I think that if we get to them before they get to this point, I think that there will be a difference."

According to the Syracuse City School District's Code of Conduct, the roles and responsibilities of an SRO include working with administrators and the school's faculty and staff to enforce safety procedures, provide guidance on law-related issues and prevent criminal behavior.

Black says there is more to it.

"Building a rapport with people in general is a duty and that is why we take an oath," Black said. "Protecting and serving is what we do. However, building those relationships within the community is what allows us to be better at protecting and serving."

This spring, the school district held a forum for Syracuse residents concerned about safety issues after a six-minute shooting spree by a troubled former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The mid-February shooting left 14 students and three staffers dead. That incident spawned the national March for Our Lives.

Black works closely with three sentries who also monitor the school building throughout the day, conduct metal detector searches and keep Black abreast of any suspicious activity, sometimes working with administrators to address any issues.

"Throughout the day we touch base," Black said. "If there's something brewing amongst the students and they hear about it, or I hear about it, we try to inform each other so that we can prevent it from even happening."

When the halls of ITC grow silent, Black retreats to her office, which she says is rarely empty. Students often pile in to seek advice about issues, discuss their post-graduation plans or just grab a Tic Tac or some hot chocolate before class.

While Black is first and foremost an officer, to many students at ITC she is a friend, a confidante or an "auntie" as senior Kiaja Enoch put it. Enoch regularly visits Black's office throughout the school day.

"I call her my auntie, I go to her for everything," Enoch said. "Some people don't really got that connection with their police officers at their schools, they're probably intimidated by them, but I know I got that connection with her."

Senior Knariana Hoyle, a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, says that any disconnect between students and their SROs stems from a lack of interaction.

> ***"Most people become a police officer because they want to make a change."***
>
> — Containa Black

"She's an officer, but you don't look at her as an officer," Hoyle said. "Kids from other schools feel like their officers make them nervous because their officers are armed, and the officers don't talk to them. We feel safe because she's interacting with us."

Students said they felt safer around their SRO rather than a street cop and that knowing their SRO is what makes the difference.

Black says that she is not trying to change anybody's mind, but she hopes to help young adults become better versions of themselves by being a deterrent and not allowing her students to become a statistic.

Surrounded by photos of the current and former students that she refers to as her kids, Black stressed that for SROs, guidance and forming relationships is part of the job description.

"If an adult doesn't try to steer a child in the right direction at any point, at any given time, this is definitely not the job for you," Black said. "Every child is your child."

ON THE SIDE

BY THE NUMBERS

Here are Syracuse high school enrollments and number of SROs in each:

Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central: 1 SRO – 541 students

PSLA High School at Fowler: 2 SROs – 873 students

Nottingham High School: 2 SROs – 1,316 students

Corcoran High School: 2 SROs – 1,282 students

Henninger High School: 2 SROs – 1,676 students

— Source: Syracuse City School District

According to the **National Center for Education Statistics**, for the decade 2005-2006 to 2015-2016, the percentage of all public schools with a security guard, a school resource officer or other sworn law enforcement officer on campus at least once a week increased from 42 percent to 57 percent. Here is a breakdown:

For **primary schools**, 19 percentage point increase (45 percent of all primary schools)

For **middle schools**, 10 percentage point increase (73 percent of all middle schools)

For **high schools**, 6 percentage point increase (81 percent of all high schools)

— Source: National Center for Education Statistics

ON THE SIDE

ABOUT THE SERIES

Many people think of the police force as one unit, like a tribe with a single identity. But beyond the blue of the uniform, each police officer is unique. This project takes you inside the lives of the chief and several officers in Syracuse, showing that the force is truly a collection of individuals. Given the country's major news events involving the police over the past few years, and because this is a city where the minority population has very nearly become the majority, we pay special attention to minority officers in this project. They account for just one in every 10 officers, though Syracuse is 45 percent minority. Our project is not intended to be either "positive" or "negative," but rather an honest and powerful look at this complex issue — all with the hope that it improves police and community relations.

Yet while race matters, it is not everything. As the new chief in Ferguson, Missouri, told a reporter on our team, when citizens see police, they don't see individuals or race, "They see you as blue."

VIEW ONLINE

Visit TheyWearBlue.com to see the full series

FACING FEELINGS

Cops learn to deal with emotions — not ignore or suppress them

> Blue Courage is billed as a transformational two-day leadership development workshop to support the mental health of police officers. This workshop was held in New Hampshire. | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

By | Jasmine Gomez
They Wear Blue reporter

The Blue Courage program encourages police to deal with the overwhelming stress of the job

Officer Kristie Froio stumbled through the woods near Onondaga Creek Boulevard, struggling to see through the bleeding gash near her eye, searching for the patrol partner she'd become separated from.

Responding to a call about an outdoor fire, the pair encountered the schizophrenic man who started it. He'd stopped taking his medication and was high on drugs, and the officers offered to take him to the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP), a licensed psychiatric emergency room. He resisted, and when they pushed it, he ran into the woods, Froio first in pursuit.

She caught up with him and struck him across the shoulder with the flashlight she was using to see in the dark. To her surprise, the suspect responded with a blow using a metal pipe to the left side of her face. She went dark, briefly unconscious.

"I remember telling myself, 'Kristie you got to wake up, you got to wake up! He's going to kill you if you don't,' " the 16-year veteran said last year, easily recalling details of the incident a full decade ago.

She did rouse herself and called for backup, but the trauma has endured.

Froio suffered serious nerve damage to her upper cheek and left side, severe sinus damage that she has tried to address with three sinus surgeries over the past 10 years, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and intense nightmares.

The stress of traumatic experiences like these stays with an officer long past a call has ended. The stress of the job, day in and out, can have several effects on an officer, including burnout, the onset of PTSD, development of conditions like anxiety and alcoholism, and even suicide. A study on police suicide from 2008 to 2012 found that the number of officers who take their own lives is twice the number of those killed by felons.

Statistics like these have led to the development of programs like Blue Courage, a workshop that aims to shift police culture by getting officers to take charge of their well-being — not only physically but mentally. It's an aspect of health that isn't typically addressed in law enforcement.

The two-day training, which Froio has become certified to instruct, encourages law enforcement officers

to reflect on their careers and lives through a model the trainers have developed that addresses topics like emotions related to the job and police culture, as well as breathing to relieve stress. While police officers are usually led to embrace a culture of bravado and to suppress feelings, Blue Courage instead teaches them to soften up and actively address those raw emotions.

The Blue Courage program was recently implemented by the Syracuse Police Department, and Officer Dzenan Selimovic, who's been with the SPD since 2005, said for him it has been a great help. He has also become certified to teach the course. One of his most haunting memories is seeing a woman whose face and chest were blistered by hot grease thrown on her by a man after she refused sex with him. At another call, he still remembers a bleeding suspect dying in his arms.

Selimovic is a refugee of the Bosnian war and says the experiences in his home country have better equipped him to deal with the stresses of his daily job. He says police departments rarely equip their forces with the tools necessary to deal with the toll — and many times the culture prevents cops from doing so out of fear of looking weak.

"They give you a gun, a belt, a car, radio, bulletproof vest and everything else, but nobody builds you a bulletproof mind. You're expected to be the tough guy," Selimovic said.

At a recent Blue Courage workshop in Concord, N.H., officers from throughout the state gathered to navigate a set of the program's exercises. The curriculum asks officers to respond to a series of prompts at the end of each topic taught. In many of the group discussions, officers revealed personal events that have influenced their attitudes toward policing.

Nate Lindsay, an officer with the Manchester Police Department, said the stresses of a host of traumatic events over the years have taken a toll on him. He said there's an unreasonable expectation on officers to be OK all the time.

"They're supposed to be the strong ones," he said. "They're supposed to be the helpers, but if you keep getting punched you're going to fall down at one point."

Lindsay has dealt with several traumatic experiences, including losing his partner, who was shot and killed

How a shooting affected an officer: A chase, an unshakeable memory

This statement from Syracuse Police Officer Patricia Sergeant was read into the record at the sentencing of Quashar Neil in spring 2017. Neil was convicted of attempted murder for firing at Sergeant during a high-speed chase in November 2015. Neil was being pursued for firing at someone else.

He was sentenced in Onondaga County Court to 40 years to life for attempted murder and other charges in connection with the events that November.

• • •

Thank you to the court for giving me an opportunity to be heard. I am very grateful that I am alive today to be able to do so.

The incident on Nov. 19, 2015, has had a traumatic impact on my life. The actions of Quashar Neil on that night will forever be with me and my family. I often have flashbacks of seeing the gun come out of the window and the hooded male point at me as I was seated in my patrol car, then see the muzzle flashes as I dove for cover as he tried to kill me.

After the shooting stopped, the chase began. My mind raced thinking about not losing the vehicle, but also terrified that I may crash my patrol car and be injured or crashing and allowing him to try and kill me again. I would play the scenario in my mind all of the time.

When I was sent home that night, I had to tell my daughter why I was home, why I was home so early. As I explained the incident, she started to cry, which just devastated me, thinking about what could have happened. She is now burdened with the fact that someone wanted me, her only parent, dead because of the job that I do.

As a result of Quashar Neil's actions, I began having severe anxiety attacks. I felt that someone was squeezing my throat and crashing my chest. That was followed by breaking out in hives for over a year and a half. I had to leave from and miss work for several days due to those outbreaks.

We all know the dangers of being a police officer, but it's people like Quashar Neil who have no regard for human life and no respect for authority that have made this job even more dangerous in recent years.

Being a single mother of mixed-race children, the comments made during this trial have been very upsetting. This was not a lynching. It had nothing to do with Quashar Neil's race. It had to do with the fact that he tried to kill me.

All too often, lawyers in the media try to make people believe these outrageous lies when they don't have all the facts.

After hearing the physical and emotional toll this incident has had on me and my family, I hope that you understand why I'm asking you to impose the life sentence for Quashar Neil. I don't want Quashar Neil to ever have a chance to hurt me or any of my co-workers again.

Thank you for allowing me to express how his actions have affected me.

BLUE COURAGE

This police and law enforcement training program offers a two-day workshop for all levels of the force.

Training focuses on stress management, developing resilience, igniting culture change, combating cynicism, while improving overall health and well-being.

To learn more: Visit bluecourage.com

ON THE SIDE

COPS SPEAK

Go online to listen to **discussions** from a two-day Blue Courage training session. Visit: TheyWearBlue.com/blue-courage/

> Officers hear a stress-management lecture in New Hampshire in 2017. | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

while apprehending a suspect on Lindsay's night off. And Lindsay took the murder of an 8-year-old hard: He called his wife and cried on the phone that day.

Troy Pickering, a deputy sheriff in Strafford County, said he has also had several low points. He's resorted to alcohol, and focused on his hobbies of wrestling and running, sometimes pushing it so far that he'd collapse on the side of the road.

"The price of being me may not have been worth it," he said.

One of Pickering's worst memories was attempting to resuscitate an infant, who died.

"I'll never get that taste out of my mouth. There'll be days when I'm eating dinner or something and I'll push the dinner aside because for whatever reason I'm back there for that split second — the fatal accidents, the suicides, the abuse of children, all those things over a course of time wear you down," Pickering said.

Pickering said he has suffered from burnout. He attended the Blue Courage training with the hope of reigniting passion for his career.

For some officers, the stress has manifested itself in making them hyper-aware of the dangers of everyday life, affecting the decisions they make for their family. Tony McKnight, an officer with the Somersworth Police Department, and his wife have their children home-schooled. Their kids attend traditional school only once a week. It's McKnight's way of sheltering his children from the reality he's seen from exposure to the worst of people every day, he said.

For others, the job can have an effect on life at home. Jim Ford, who's now a campus police officer at the University of New Hampshire, said the job often prevented him from participating positively in family life.

"For me, it was sort of a shutdown situation. I'd go to work, I'd do my job, I think I did it well, and then I'd come home. I wouldn't participate in the family," he said.

Though the SPD began offering the Blue Courage training to its officers in 2016, the department already had a start on addressing mental health. About six years ago, Officer Ann Baumann and others founded a volunteer peer support group. They offer resources to officers who seek it, whether the issue is related to their personal life or the job. These volunteers are also required to reach out to officers who have been involved in a critical incident, such as a shooting, to offer them support.

Though talking about emotions has been and is still seen as taboo in many police departments, Baumann said she has seen a shift toward more openness.

"Sometimes it is a matter of survival in the moment, but I have seen a little bit of a shift. I think that's because there's younger people coming in and it's just a different generation probably and they're more open about talking about stuff like that," Baumann said.

In the SPD, Blue Courage adds a method of self-care, but the program is only as good as those taking it allow it to be, Selimovic said.

"You can break up and build up as much as you want. If you like to live in your misery and you're comfortable in your misery, go ahead, live that. But if you like to break out, Blue Courage will show you the ways of doing it."

ON THE SIDE

RESEARCH ON MOMS

Lameika Armstead, a doctor of philosophy in industrial and organizational psychology, published a dissertation titled, “Balancing the Life: A case study on single African-American working mothers.” Here is a look at some of what her research revealed.

SUPERWOMAN IMAGE

This framework pinpoints the root of the superwoman mentality that black women seem to hold. They are putting so much on themselves, and so determined to get it done, that they actually take themselves out of it and do everything for everyone else and not themselves.

SUPPORT NETWORK

Support was huge for these ladies. The support didn’t always come from the kids’ dads — they had found ways to get support from other people in their lives.

- 50 percent came from the participants’ moms. As the women worked or went to school, the grandmothers would help a lot.
- 37 percent came from friends, mostly female friends
- 3 percent came from the kids’ dads or other men

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Single mothers discuss what children really need from their fathers

> Myesha Britt, with her daughters Willow (top) and Autumn, says “everything is for them.” | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo

> Naja Pitts, here with daughter Laila, participated in the panel her father created. | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo

> Family is important to Dekera Ogletree, pictured with her children, from left: Daquan Jr., Ar'Queen and Amiya. She said she liked learning about different opinions at the panel for single mothers. | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo

By | Julianna Whiteway
Staff reporter

Mothers from the South Side agree that being a single parent is a tough, but rewarding job

It's not about the latest Jordans.

It's about spending time together.

Some single South Side moms who've been meeting lately say time is what their kids need from a dad, not a gift. And time with the kids buys time for the mothers, too.

"Just spend time with her 'cause she doesn't know who's buying her sneakers or who's putting dinner on the table," said Naja Pitts, a single mother who recently was part of a panel with other single mothers at Syracuse Community Connections, formerly Southwest Community Center. "She just wants memories. Ten years from now, she can't wear those same sneakers that you just bought. It's more so, she's gonna have those memories for the rest of her life."

Anthony Pitts, who is Naja's father and the coordinator for the Healthy Start Fatherhood program based at the center, works with single fathers, helping them find support and resources. He invited single mothers to a panel held at the center to learn more about their needs so he could communicate it to the group of fathers. Pitts reached out to Naja and a few other single mothers to be part of it and to invite other women they know. Since then, they have met three times and hope to meet every month moving forward.

"When my dad first asked me to do it, I personally was going to support him but I didn't think I was going to say much," Naja said with a laugh. "I would not open up to everybody about how I'm a single mom, but I feel like once that conversation got rolling, I really enjoyed it."

For the first session when Anthony met with the

ON THE SIDE

RESEARCH ON MOMS

WORKPLACE PROGRAMS

Do moms take advantage of programs offered by their work, if there are any? It didn't rely so much on the company or programs in place, but it was more about their relationship with their supervisors or manager. If supervisors were mothers or had kids, they may be more understanding and let them make up time if needed. On the other hand, if they had supervisors who were not parents, were more strict, or were male supervisors who didn't understand, it was harder for the moms to work and care for their families without that support.

LIFE BALANCE

The first question asked of research participants:

On a scale from 1 to 5, what would you rate your current work/life balance status with 1 being "I have no balance at all" and 5 being "It's great." At first the participants would say they were a 4 or 5 and had things under control, and their lives were balanced. Once they got through all of the questions and finished the interviews, the women's answers changed.

"Almost all of the ladies said, 'Wow, I have no balance, I didn't even realize how much stress and how much I do. ... I never think about how I have no time for me.'"

ON THE SIDE

Q&A WITH MOMS

In his third meeting with single mothers, Timothy "Noble" Jennings-Bey asked questions intended for the women to think about their relationships.

Q: What does it mean to be a parent or a mother?
Women: To be a teacher, role model, manage discipline

Q: You (the parent) have to set a course for your household. They teach you in criminology courses, criminal justice, all families are dysfunctional, on a scale from zero to 100. They say we all fall in there somewhere because there is no perfect situation. But how do you set the course or set the tone for your household to run a certain way?
Women: Stability, consistency, routine, foundation

Q: What should the foundation be rooted in?
Love

Q: What kind of love?
Unconditional love

Q: What's the expectation from women to meet somebody in life to match that expectation?
Women:

- Sometimes you have to spend a lot of time alone.
- You have to know yourself.
- Go into the relationship knowing who you are and what you're bringing to the table.

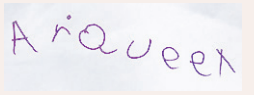
HOW KIDS FEEL ABOUT THEIR MOMS

Photos and text by Julianna Whiteway

DEKERA OGLETREE'S CHILDREN

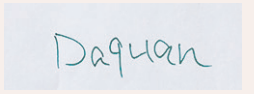
What's something special about your mom?
She always takes me to the mall.

What do you love about your mom?
She picks me up from school and takes care of me.



What's something special about your mom?
She always picks me up from school. She takes care of me.

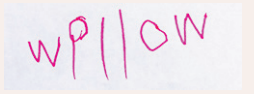
What do you love about your mom?
Her kisses.



What's something special about your mom?
That she's nice and she takes care of me.

What do you love about your mom?
She treats me good.

MYESHA BRITT'S DAUGHTER



What do you love about your mom?
Birthdays! I love her!

What's your favorite thing about your mom?
Juice! She makes me laugh.

What is special about your mom?
She makes me feel better. I love her very, very much.

single mothers, Naja said he had five questions, but they got through only one "because everyone got so deep into it."

She explained, "As a mom, you just learn to do it yourself. I don't even think it's a pride thing, it's just more so like, 'This is my kid, and I'm going to do whatever to make sure that they're straight.' So after a while, I just want you to spend time and be there for the kid."

The women have a routine and schedule, but the challenges still arise.

"Most mothers are really looking for time because being a single mother is about the grocery store, running to the corner store, just getting gas," said Myesha Britt, one of the mothers who was part of the discussion. "I gotta tie your shoe and his shoe? It's just constant. It's just always something."

According to the Statistical Atlas, which uses U.S. Census Bureau data, 54.4 percent of all Syracuse households are headed by single moms — meaning they are either married with the spouse absent, divorced, never married or widowed. Just 9.4 percent of households are headed by single men. Census data indicates that nationally, this trend overwhelmingly affects African-American households: 74.3 percent of all white children under age 18 live with both parents, but the figure is just 38.7 percent for African-Americans. Even more stark: More than one in three black children in the U.S. live with unmarried mothers, compared to one in about 16 for white children.

Lameika Armstead is a work/life balance advocate and has studied how single, African-American working mothers cope. She published a dissertation titled, "Balancing the Life: A case study on single African-American working mothers." She grew up an only child, raised by an African-American single working mom whom Armstead describes as her biggest cheerleader throughout her studies. She is now a doctor of philosophy in industrial and organizational psychology.

"From a mom's perspective, it's not about the things," Armstead said. "Us women, of course, we're far more nurturing, a little more in tune to emotions, so we realize the time spent and the memories having that connection with their fathers is what's most important. ... We just have a totally different perspective on that."

Armstead discovered five main themes, plus a few smaller ones, that were universal among the women she interviewed. The most prominent was time — not having enough time in their day to do everything they needed to do.

"The byproduct of that is the dads weren't spending enough time," Armstead said. "However, their (mothers') focus is more on, 'I just need more time to do more things. I have a hundred things to do and have time for 50.'"

Having the chance to hear other single parents share their stories made the discussion at the center feel like group therapy in a way.

"I believe it's a good group because you actually get different opinions," said Dekera Ogletree, a mother who participated and who works at the center.

At the first discussion, there were a few faces new to some of the single moms who are at the center every week, providing more views and more opportunities to relate to one another.

"I thought it was going to be pretty good, like Dekera said," Britt said. "You just get different scenarios because ... the people that were in there are all single parents, but we all have different stuff going on. We're single parents for different reasons, maybe 'cause one's incarcerated, maybe 'cause one's just not around ... just different reasons."

Hearing that they're not the only women making it work, that others also want their children to have more than the mothers may be able to offer, is reassuring, they said.

"It's like it could turn into a support group because everybody's going through the same things and everybody's trying to get to the next level," Naja said.

Armstead, the advocate and founder and CEO of The Armstead Group, was encouraged to hear that the Syracuse men were willing to hear feedback from the mothers, and she hopes the women continue to meet.

She said that as an African-American woman herself, she was especially aware of what she called "implicit psychological neglect."

Armstead added, "We don't seek mental health. We don't seek counseling. We don't seek anything that has to do with trying to make our mental health better."

Anthony said he admires the women on his side of the family, and notes that he wasn't always on "the right side of society." He said things "happened" in his life that made a change necessary, and he helped when his kids' mothers were at work. He said he cleaned, did the dishes and cooked their food.

"I felt it was my job to lessen the load (for the mothers)," he said. "Everybody doesn't have that sense."

For the dads he's working with, he said he makes sure he puts them in a position to succeed. When they're writing down goals, he doesn't let them get too "lofty." They may set goals for the five-year plan, but he wants them to look at what's going on now and with the three-month plan.

Anthony said a lot of the dads understand that moms need time.

"They understand because a lot of my dads have had the same disappointment from their dad," Anthony said about the group of men he helps. "I didn't set out to make the same mistakes my dad did. I set out to do the exact opposite of him and ended up in the same predicament as he did — almost identical. And he didn't set out

ON THE SIDE

Q&A WITH MOMS

Q: What's to be brought to the table?

Women:

- Respect
- I want an open heart.
- I want you to accept me for who I am so I have to be like that with you. If it's all out there on the table, then no one can break that.
- If you keep bickering back and forth, it shows you that you're fighting for something or nothing; you just have to know the two.

Q: It's safe to say that most times when you're in a relationship, you meet people representatives and not really that person. So you're dealing with people with masks on ... that mask is layered. Some people have their faces out to here because they have so many masks in between for so many situations.

I think different situations remove a mask every time. You get to know the person. You see how they react to certain situations differently.

ON THE SIDE

Q&A WITH MOMS

Q: Be careful when you remove a mask because it's painful. … Here I come along trying to peel away from that and that's when the arguing and bickering starts because when you start removing people's mask, they feel wronged.
Especially if you're dealing with someone who's been in numerous relationships. You're basically dealing with someone else's past, whether female or male, you'll be dealing with what someone did before you.

Q: Do you have to or do we choose to?
If we meet each other and the table's set. You have to have some expectation of what you want from me.

Q: What if he doesn't have a job?
As long as someone's giving effort, showing they're trying to be a better person or progress in life, it's workable.

Q: What if he's doing nothing? Would you accept that?
Women:
- In my past!
- If you have no ambition, then no … because I'm trying to move forward … especially if we have to be a team and work as one.
- Sometimes you can't put a time limit on someone.

to make the same mistakes his dad did, but he did."

Anthony said in his opinion, most dads stay away because of the embarrassment of not being able to do the things they think they should do for their kids.

"It's embarrassing when you feel you can't do the right thing by your child … then when they (dads) feel like they're capable of it, of doing certain things, they'll pop up and resurface. And then some of the time they get so caught in the habit of not being present that they just never be present. It's like they're running from themselves."

In other cases, the dads may not be able to visit. Three of the dads of Naja's, Britt's and Ogletree's children are incarcerated. For Ogletree's two older kids, it's something else.

> ***"It's like it could turn into a support group because everybody's going through the same things and … trying to get to the next level."***
>
> — Naja Pitts

"I think as mothers, we tend to try to keep our kids as busy as possible and to distract them, so they won't have the thoughts of knowing they can't get (to) their father or he can't come to them right now," Ogletree said. "So we do a lot of covering up. I have three kids. Two of my kids' father is deceased; my youngest daughter, her dad is incarcerated."

Her two oldest bring up their father at times. For Ogletree herself, the topic brought tears to her eyes recently.

"It's situations like that," Britt said as she, too, began to cry. "Her kids can't see their father … that really pisses me off. She has to go through that every day, and her kids don't get to see their father. When he was out buying them sneakers and stuff, that don't mean anything."

The father, Daquan Williams, was 21 when he was shot in the chest while riding in a minivan early one morning on Interstate 690 in 2009. He was taken to St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center, where he was pronounced dead within the hour. It remains unclear who was involved and if Williams was the target. His two children with Ogletree are a son, Daquan Jr., who was 2 years old at the time, and daughter, Amiya, who was 6 months.

"That's my cousin so I was around when all that was going on," Britt said. "Her kids can't see their father. Time is everything. You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow or today."

For Britt, before having kids, having a job was not the first thing on her mind. Now, her kids mean so much to her, she wants to do more for them.

"It's those small things," she said. "My daughter will say, 'I love you,' and I'll be like 'awww.' These small things. That is the most meaningful thing in the world. Your kid can say, 'You're the best mom'… I might not be the best mom but 'You said it, OK, you're my child so thank you,'" Britt said laughing. "I'm going to take that and run with that."

Even with those humbling moments, feeling like there's not enough time to get it all done, these moms say they do see where they've grown.

"I think I'm more motivated now," Naja said. "I feel like I can take on the world. I've always been a procrastinator and now with Laila, there is not time to wait. She's going to be 4 in November and my biggest thing is I want her to grow (up) in the house. I don't want you to be 18 and I'm just finding a house. I want you to be able to grow up in it. So there's not time to wait … working 10 times harder. It's me and one other person waiting on that degree."

Armstead said that so often black women have had to be the backbone in the community because of so many of the challenges and difficulties facing black men. The women took on that role.

"With that it was very loud and clear, and apparent in my study, that women didn't have the time to sit around and say, 'Woe is me … I don't have this, I don't have that.' They just know they have to take care of their kids. They know they will get it done. They didn't always know how, and they had a lot of stress around it, but the bottom line is that they were going to get it done."

Britt mentioned that when it comes to the kids, as long as they're "full, bathed, in a bed, as long as clothes are picked … nope, clothes aren't picked up, but they're clean," she said laughing. "As long as everything is for them, you just forget about yourself."

Ogletree and Naja agreed, chiming in about how they finally relax at bedtime — that is, if the kids don't wake up. Even then, they laugh about how they love being called "mom," even if it's interrupting that downtime.

The women said a few dads from Anthony's group sat in on that first discussion and weren't the type who aren't around. They have tried to be involved and want

help from their child's mom. Some of the men have been around since Day One, wanting to see a child's first step and wanting even more time with their child. These women said that they can probably learn from those dads' perspective, too.

Britt said now that their kids are older, they look at things differently. They've learned how to adapt and be content, no matter what support they have from the dad.

"If he doesn't want to, don't stress him, don't nag him ... if he doesn't come, he just doesn't show up," Britt said. "And it is what it is. I'll take you to Chuck E. Cheese."

Each mom sees the importance of being positive, and they've learned to be patient.

"They take their own image and picture of the situation," Ogletree said of the kids. "Once they grow older, they see what it is and what it isn't."

One of the men who spoke during the first meeting and has met with the women again since then is Timothy "Noble" Jennings-Bey. He asked them questions that made them think about their relationships. He broke down what love is and self-discipline.

"A big thing that he said that really caught on for me was when you decide to get in a relationship and love someone, you have to love yourself and be your own person, and they have to be their own person," Naja said. "Then you all come together. You can't find yourself within another person."

The mothers agreed they still welcome these group meetings, to hear perspective, especially from dads who are trying to change.

"I'd like to hear from a dad that can admit, 'I haven't been around,'" Naja said. "For a woman, we can come up with a thousand theories in our head but to hear an actual perspective, to hear a dad admit he hasn't been around ... 'but I've been going through this.'"

The dads that are part of these three moms' lives are incarcerated. The women are focused on caring for their kids and letting the dads talk to them. Naja takes her daughter to visit sometimes, even though he's not nearby.

"I'm helping by trying to make this stepping stone for you to be in her life," Naja said of her attitude. "When you come home, be consistent."

For Ogletree's youngest daughter, her dad was helpful before he was incarcerated, and now since the parents aren't together, Ogletree said she's waiting to see how they co-parent when he gets out.

"I wouldn't say it's more so being patient because we're not really waiting for them to do it, and you're not going to close the door totally to your kid's father, or whatever the case may be," Ogletree said. "The door is always going to be open for them to be a parent, when they want to be a parent ... so it's not us waiting because we're still doing what we have to do as a mother. We're still going to get the job done."

THINK ON THESE THINGS

By | Lou Carol Franklin

Mother's Day is here again. Time to run out to the Dollar Tree and pick out that special card. Then off to the grocery store to grab a dozen roses. Did you make a dinner reservation yet or are you going to cook her a good meal today?

Oh, the hustle and bustle to get ready to celebrate Mother's Day, that one special day. Well, think on these things.

Now I Lay Me

Now I Lay Me
Down to Sleep
I Thank the Good Lord
My Soul He did Keep
I Wanted To See You
Before I Went Home
I Even Waited Every Day
By The Telephone
I Knew You Were Busy
With So Much to Do
I Just Wanted To Say That I Always Loved You
Sometimes I Did Wonder Why You stayed
Away So Long
Why I Even Wondered
If I Had Done Something Wrong
If I Did, Please Forgive Me
I Never Meant Any Harm
I Wanted So Much to Hold You
Tightly In My Arms
I Knew You Would Come To See Me
It Was Just a Matter of Time
I'm Sorry I'm Not There with You
I Just Ran Out of Mine.

— By Lou Carol Franklin
Published in her book of poetic expressions, "The Missed Party"

ON THE SIDE

Q&A WITH MOMS

Q: What allows the abuse to seep in? BecauAEse women are strong, just in general. Nothing on this planet would be here without the assistance of a woman. If I created something, and my mother had me, in essence you could say she created it, because if she didn't have me, I wouldn't have been able to create it. So that level of strength that you have, how is that forfeited for other things to creep in?

I think it starts more with if you don't have that self love inside of yourself ... not only for women but for men too, because there are abusive women to men. So there at the end of the day, more of the fact is if you have a partner that is more aggressive than the other one and that other person is already living with non-self love ... they're looking for someone to love them, that manipulation gets round up in their head. Now they're feeling like they think they can't live without them so now the abuse can start. The woman or the man can start beating on their other half, but they're thinking they're doing it because they love them but in reality, they don't even love themselves.

Former parolees lead re-entry efforts

> After serving more than 19 years in prison, Charles Rivers, 48, returned to Syracuse in 2012 to start again. He worked part-time jobs and started earning his bachelor's degree. In 2016, he started his first full-time job when PEACE, Inc. hired him to run the South Side center. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

Charles Rivers and Karen Loftin oversee $95,000 pilot program to reunite families

By lunch time one day last year, Charles Rivers had gone from being a supervised parolee to a welcomed professional in the same office building where hours before one individual held the power to revoke his freedom.

"As a parolee, you look at parole as an adversary," Rivers said. "You go in thinking, 'I got to go see this guy that could violate me at any time.' "

This particular day was noteworthy because it was his final office visit with his parole officer, known as a "PO." And after that 8:30 a.m. appointment, the last thing Rivers wanted to be told upon his return to the South Side community center he runs is that he had to return downtown for a meeting with the bureau chief of parole.

"Nah. I was just there," he remembers reluctantly telling his newly hired co-worker. "I'm not going back."

But Karen Loftin, who had worked with Rivers for just over two months at that point, already knew he had come from his final PO meeting. She wanted to push him into his new capacity as the head of the center. "He was nervous, but I told him: 'You're going,'" she said firmly. "'You're a coordinator now.'"

Arriving back to the state building, Rivers remembers making eye contact with the guards who hours before made him remove his belt and empty his pockets. Parolees enter through metal detectors; professionals walk in.

"Karen just strolls through like she belongs," recalled Rivers, who paused at the entrance. "Then a guard asked: 'Are you with her?'" Muttering a hesitant "yes," he was then gestured through.

The experience signaled a new era.

"This was the day I came out of the shadows," he said.

PILOT PROGRAM

For nearly three years now, Rivers has overseen PEACE, Inc.'s Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center. Rivers spent more than 19 years in prison, serving a total of three state stints. While his employer knew he had a criminal background, he never shared specifics.

When Rivers met with his PO that last time, relief should have been instant. But the nerve-wracking feelings of stress, intimidation and mistrust, even after hearing praise on all he had accomplished, he says, were hard to shake. For his five years on parole, he had remained careful and calculated with what he shared from his past. Slowly, year by year, he would open up more to those he worked with — and would accomplish more.

In those last two years before getting off parole, he took on a full-time role as coordinator of the center, located at 136 Dr. Martin Luther King West (formerly West Castle Street). He also purchased a home, earned degrees and mentored others.

He's now been off parole for 10 months, since Father's Day of 2017. Much of that time has been spent dedicated to helping other parolees through his work at PEACE. "I know what a parolee feels," he said, "because I was on the other side of that desk, literally."

This year PEACE, a nonprofit agency self-described to "empower people to thrive," celebrates 50 years of service to the community, with one of its core components focused on re-entry support for people like Rivers fresh out of prison. In December 2016, PEACE received a boost to these efforts when the state awarded a $95,000 grant to launch a pilot program for family reunification. In addition to overcoming the transitional barriers to finding employment, adequate housing and attaining photo identification, ex-offenders struggle to reconcile with family members who may have spent years or even decades without them. Rivers says it takes time to reconnect, to learn what each person's new role is, and to figure out what day-to-day life will be like moving forward. Re-entry programs are designed to help people meet and beat these challenges

> Re-entry case manager Karen Loftin, 52, was hired by PEACE under the Family Reunification Pilot grant to work with each ex-offender to support their needs during transition from prison back to their family. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

ON THE SIDE

PILOT PROGRESS

December 2016: PEACE awarded $95,000 pilot grant from state

February 2017: PEACE hires Karen Loftin as re-entry case manager

March 2017: Gov. Andrew Cuomo publicly announces the program

December 2017: State loosens guidelines — program funds can be used to help any parolees, not just those living with families in public housing

February 2018: Syracuse's grant funds run out, eliminating Loftin's job, at least for a time

March 5, 2018: State reaches out to PEACE for progress report and consideration of a grant renewal

March 31, 2018: New York state lawmakers approve 2018 state budget

April/May 2018: New York Department of State is in the process of assessing each pilot program in consideration of grant renewal

ON THE SIDE

HOW IT WAS SPENT

Each agency received $95,000 to hire a case manager. Remaining money was used for:

- $3,500, maximum, per family unit as assistance toward the cost of educational or vocational programs, as stipends to complete training, or for supplemental substance abuse treatment
- $4,750 for overhead costs to operate the center
- Incidental costs such as bus passes, fees for paperwork or for necessary job items, such as work boots and clothes

> Charles Rivers, coordinator for the Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center, steps out of the center's back door to oversee the weekly delivery from the Food Bank of Central New York for the center's food pantry. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

by allowing them to concentrate on adjusting to life on the outside. The grant allowed Rivers to focus on the needs of offenders' family members; Loftin was hired in February 2017 to serve as the re-entry case manager.

The grant — also awarded to two other cities — had no set guidelines, allowing each resource center to craft its own plan modeled off the successful New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) initiative launched in 2013 called the Family Re-entry Pilot Program (FRPP).

Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) first learned about the opportunity to replicate the initiative here when Bill Simmons, executive director and president of the New York State Public Housing Authority Directors Association, heard a presentation on that pilot's success. The overview given by Marta Nelson, executive director of the Governor's Council on Community Re-Entry and Reintegration, showed how coordinated support could prevent recidivism, the tendency of an ex-offender to reoffend. Nelson used data from a 2016 study by the Vera Institute, which found none of the 85 participants in that initiative were convicted of a new crime since enrollment. The critical component, she stressed, was the additional partnership with parole and 13 nonprofit re-entry service providers to oversee carefully screened individuals allowed to return to their families in public housing.

New York state ranks ninth nationally in recidivism, according to a 2016 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, noting people released on parole are more likely to be imprisoned again not for new convictions, but for violating the conditions of their parole. According to a New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) fact sheet, in 2012, 9,372 people

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS SUPPORT RE-ENTRY EFFORTS?

Because it creates new taxpayers. Of 17 participants currently in Syracuse, nine secured jobs.

"The nine employed have a combined income of $218,000 per year. If these individuals were to be reincarcerated, the expense to New York state would be $540,000 per year, based on an expense of $60,000 per inmate."

Mary Beth Welch
Director of family services for PEACE

> Charles Rivers carries in boxes of donated food to be organized and then distributed during the center's weekly food pantry hours. In addition to running the center, Rivers serves as president of the Syracuse Inner City Rotary Club. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

were released from DOCCS facilities and placed on parole. Within three years of their release, more than half were reincarcerated — 83.7 percent for violating the conditions of their parole and 16.3 percent for committing a new crime.

In bringing the pilot to Syracuse, SHA partnered with PEACE to provide case management to maximize the initial pilot's proven success. The final partner in Syracuse was parole (DOCCS). "This is the first time we've worked directly with parole," Simmons said. Rivers also noted this has been the first face-to-face interaction between leadership in parole and staff at PEACE. DOCCS declined to speak on the record for this story.

The aim of the NYC pilot was to reconnect individuals with their families and provide stable housing after incarceration. Because many public housing authorities and private landlords have strict policies that exclude individuals with criminal records from being added to a lease, finding a safe and supportive place to live is a challenge.

When individuals apply for housing, the public housing authority runs a criminal background check of the applicant; everyone 16 or older who might also live there; any biological parent of children who will be living in the household, even parents who do not plan to live there and who are not part of the application. Rules governing who may be denied are very broad, allowing housing authorities to exclude people it believes will risk the health and safety of other tenants. Federal Law (42 USC § 13661(c)) gives public housing authorities the power to deny people based on criminal activity.

However, Simmons says SHA has a long history of embracing individuals with criminal backgrounds, citing a past re-entry job-training initiative, the Altamont Program, as one example. "We never flat out denied them housing," he said, noting the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has two bright-line rules: you cannot live in public housing if you are a level-one sex offender or were convicted of producing methamphetamine. "Outside of that, it was up to the individual housing authorities to have their own policy. Traditionally, we were case by case already," he said.

Simmons says SHA signed up because of the intensive case management services PEACE provides that also extend to family members, if they choose to participate. "Studies proved such support prevents recidivism," he said, noting it to be a boost to what SHA was already doing.

ENROLEES JOIN

On March 3, 2017, Gov. Andrew Cuomo publicly announced the Family Reunification Pilot Program. In addition to Syracuse, Schenectady and White Plains authorities also launched pilots in partnership with

CONTACT INFO

South Side Center

PEACE Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center

Location: 136 Dr. Martin Luther King West (formerly West Castle Street)

Phone: (315) 470-3342

Email: SouthsideFRC@peace-caa.org

Center coordinator: Charles Rivers

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday

Food bank: Noon to 4:30 p.m. every Thursday

Main office

Website: peace-caa.org

Phone: (315) 470-3300

ON THE SIDE

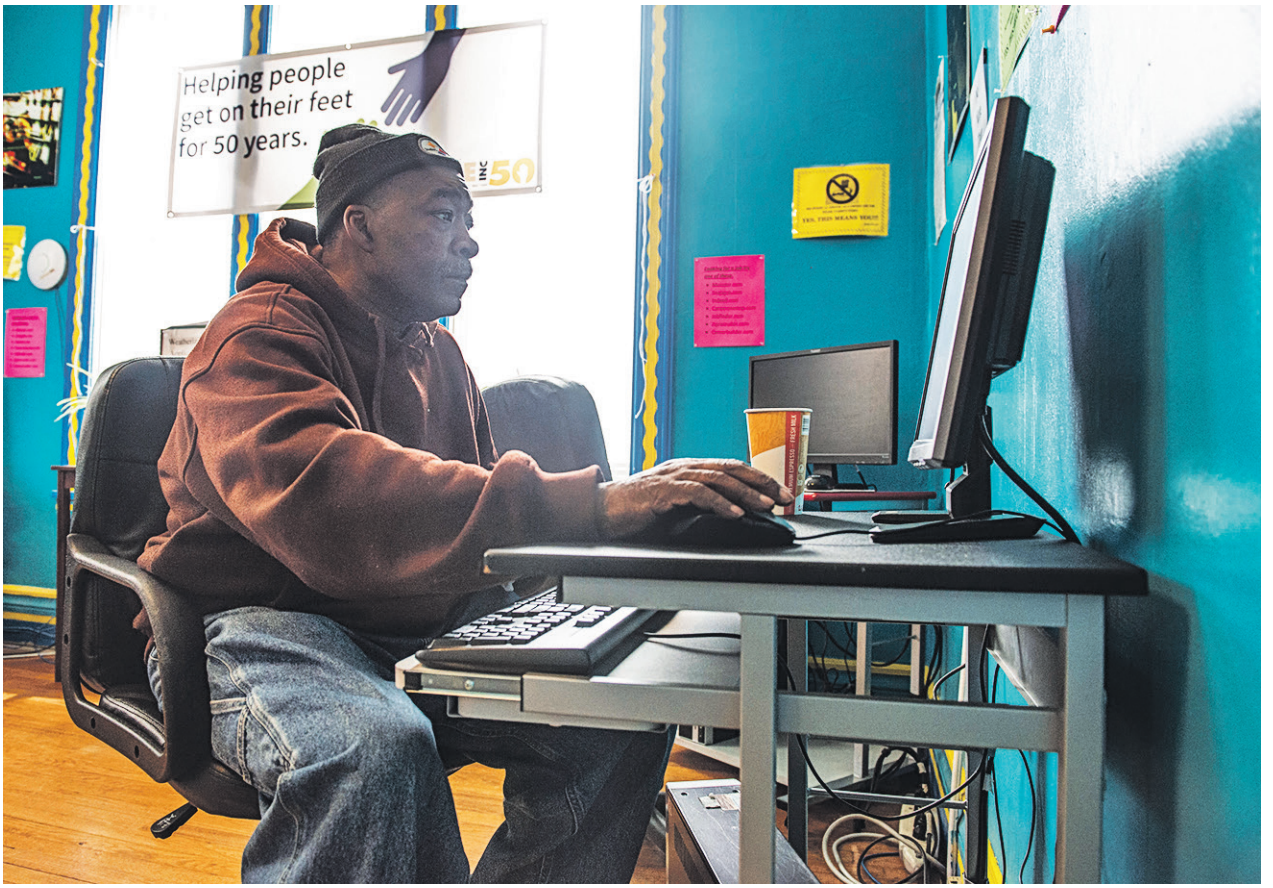
FUTURE HOUSING

In the Syracuse community, assistance for former prisoners is offered in a variety of ways.

Syracuse Housing Authority has partnered with the Center for Community Alternatives to offer new affordable housing in the 400 block of Burt Street. A component of the new construction — named Freedom Commons — will be units specifically for ex-offenders.

Bill Simmons of the Syracuse Housing Authority says this is another of the governor's initiatives for supportive housing for former prisoners. This new partnership is modeled off of The Castle Gardens, a 110,000-square-foot, 11-story mixed-use building run by The Fortune Society in West Harlem.

Construction is scheduled for completion by the end of 2018.



> James Rivers, Charles' uncle, an ex-offender, sits at a computer in the center's public computer lab, offered for residents to complete online job applications and print resumes. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

> James Rivers brings in boxes delivered by the Food Bank of Central New York one Thursday in April. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

Schenectady County Community Action Program, Inc. and the Westchester Community Opportunity Program (Westcop).

The goal of each pilot was to enroll 12 individuals by year's end.

By the end of that March after media coverage aired, Syracuse started to enroll participants. Individuals were referred by DOCCS or found their way to PEACE by word of mouth. "Many times, a family member reached out to us from housing who knew of someone that was up for parole," Loftin said.

Family members and tenants of SHA also learned about the pilot through direct outreach by Loftin, who engaged with residents shortly after being hired. By the end of February 2017, Loftin had already attended property management meetings, sat with residents at Pioneer Homes' Coffee House and knocked on doors.

Once an individual was vetted by parole, the family member on the lease also had to agree to serve as host. Loftin met with both the potential participant and the lease-holder to go over the program, its requirements and rules. An agreement was signed and next sent to housing, which then conducted its own review. SHA had the final say if a participant could move into a unit or not.

The clearance of property managers was key, Loftin says, because they are privy to details that may not be part of someone's official record. They often remember the individual and know the family situation they are returning to. "Syracuse is a small enough town that if the property manager knows the name, they'll know any issues that could surround that family," said Annette Abdelaziz, SHA grant procurement specialist whose main job function is ensuring residents stay housed.

Currently six individuals are enrolled under the grant, having extended-stay guest status, which is a policy adjustment SHA made for enrollees of this initiative. The governor's release stated that at the conclusion of the pilot program, successful participants could be added to a household's lease. As of now, no one has been added. SHA says they will consider this after an enrollee has completed a two-year trial period successfully, with SHA determining the definition of success. "The trial period is a protective measure for the rest of the household," Abdelaziz said. "If the reunification does not work out or the individual reoffends, as a guest, they can be asked to leave immediately, yet this would not jeopardize the rest of the household's tenancy."

By the end of the grant period, PEACE had seen eight individuals enrolled and living in public housing. Two of those eight, however, dropped out of the program by December 2017 — one by choice, and one violated parole and was reincarcerated for a minor offense.

In White Plains, Westcop had four participants living in public housing by the end of 2017, with none added to a lease. The policy with housing there should have allowed one participant to be reviewed and considered, but because the grant period lapsed with no word if it would continue, a lease decision was stalled by the housing authority there, said case manager John Fuller, who oversees Westcop's re-entry support.

With the goal of 12 parolee participants falling short, the stipulation on requiring participants to live in public housing was lifted by the state, and the pilot period extended until grant money ran dry. In Syracuse, that allowed a continuation into mid-February 2018. In White Plains, that extended into April 2018, but with no set closing date because additional avenues of funding had been incorporated into its plan. For example, two of the 12 participants were veterans and funded through HUD-VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers, an exception HUD allows for veterans with convictions.

With removal of the requirement of living in public housing, Syracuse instantly jumped from six participants to 17, because of PEACE's long-standing practice of supporting individuals' re-entry. Rivers said he was able to pull participants from that pool and bring them into the pilot. Westcop also reached the goal of 12.

"We just did not have the volume," said Fuller, adding that out of every parolee available during this time period, he found and enrolled all who met initial requirements. "I found the only four," he said with a laugh. In total, public housing in White Plains has 360 families, he said, which is comparatively one-eighth the size of Syracuse. SHA has 2,340 units. "So, when the scope was broadened, the men we were serving in other capacities could now be included under the pilot," Fuller said.

Loftin also felt the goal of 12 to be arbitrary. "That number was based on New York City figures, but our housing is very different," she said. She sees more

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS SUPPORT RE-ENTRY EFFORTS?

Because we should give them every opportunity to make the right decisions and not isolate them.

"When people leave incarceration, they have paid their debt. They are now part of our community. Whether we make it easy or difficult for them, that is on us. Providing a little support up front is going to save taxpayers big dollars down the line."

Annette Abdelaziz
Syracuse Housing Authority grant procurement specialist

ON THE SIDE

NEW CENTER

The Center for Community Alternatives opened the CUSE Center in March. This peer-led drop-in center offers advocacy, support and community services to ex-offenders with a history of substance abuse. Core members who show commitment to the program are eligible for a referral to CCA's Reentry Clinic, which provides no-cost legal services.

CUSE Center

Eligibility: Ex-offenders in recovery

To join: Call or walk-ins welcome

Required documentation: None

Address: 115 E. Jefferson St., Suite 300

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

Phone: (315) 422-5638

Email: cca@communityalternatives.org

Website: communityalternatives.org

ON THE SIDE

FUTURE EFFORT

MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

Looking to help those being released at the federal level, DeWayne Comer plans to launch his own nonprofit. President Barack Obama pardoned Comer, who served over two decades in federal prison on drug charges.

Comer, who was sentenced to life in prison in 1997 for running a multi-million-dollar crack ring, returned to Syracuse on Dec. 1, 2016. He then began volunteering with PEACE, Inc. and the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, and he enrolled at Onondaga Community College.

Once his time on supervised release is up, he plans to go before Congress to press for an even greater fair-sentencing law to make the crack-to-cocaine punishment 1:1 and retroactive.

(Continued on Page 23)

> James Rivers, Charles' uncle, hands off boxes of donated food items to Charles Rivers at the back entrance of the center located at 136 Dr. Martin Luther King West. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

families with loved ones who are incarcerated living in Section 8 than public housing.

All three cities regularly stayed in touch over the course of the pilot, and staff in both Syracuse and White Plains noted that Schenectady's initiative never seemed to take off. Staff with the Schenectady Community Action Program declined to speak for this story.

By March of this year, the state asked only Syracuse and White Plains to submit for a grant renewal. As of the end of April, State Department spokeswoman Mercedes Padilla said the department was in the process of assessing the overall success of each pilot, with hopes to complete the assessment in the coming weeks.

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS SUPPORT RE-ENTRY EFFORTS?

Because the cost is a steal.

"For less than $100,000 a year, you get to keep 12 so-and-sos occupied and out of prison. Even if they don't find a job (soon after being released), it's still a huge savings over returning them to prison at the cost of taxpayers."

John Fuller
Re-entry case manager for White Plains pilot

EARNING TRUST

If the grant was issued in December 2016, why did it take nearly four months to enroll participants?

In the weeks leading up to being released, prisoners are asked to provide an address. Typically, they give a family member's, spouse's or partner's home address, and if there's no family here in Syracuse, they'll often end up at the Rescue Mission.

When released, they're given $40 and a bus pass to return home. Rivers describes this as "the symbolic 40 acres and a mule." Next, they have 24 hours to report to parole, where an assessment of their mental health and level of risk to the community is conducted.

An individual's most urgent needs during the transition are housing, health and income, says Bruce Western, author of "Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison." The book, scheduled to be released May 15, examines what individuals face upon returning home through detailed accounts from more than 100 individuals on probation. Researchers on Western's team also spoke with family members.

In these in-depth interviews conducted five separate times along the span of a year, participants in the book's study shared that probation officers chiefly focus on

compliance and monitoring. "For most, we found that there was no process with probation to develop a plan and tackle priorities," Western said in a phone interview, noting only a few went above that level to also discuss with a probationer goals for the year ahead. "There is a deficit of that kind of support."

Western calls it an unmet need right now.

Rivers and Loftin would agree. When working with their clients, they first share: "We are not your parole officer."

It helps.

"After telling them that, the air clears," Rivers said. "It's like a big sigh of relief, and in that meeting, we can tell tension has left the room."

In describing a successful model, Western, who also teaches sociology at Harvard University and is co-director of the Columbia University Justice Lab, says case managers would engage parolees for long periods of time, serving as an advocate. "Coercive treatment is a difficult model," Western said. "This type of role should involve noncriminal justice actors that don't wield the threat of arrest and revocation. People view it as a continuation of surveillance and control, and many times we heard from respondents that 'the system just wants to make money off of us.'"

For this pilot, gaining such trust took time.

"People returning home have a lot of choices," Fuller added, noting in recent years, more re-entry programs are being offered. "Now they can shop programs. So they are looking for who is sincere."

Thus, his passion for the work, he believes, makes the pilot stand out. "If they can feel it, they will be willing to work with you," he said, stressing consistency is key. "You have to be able to follow up and deliver something tangible." He said if released offenders trust the case manager, they'll pass on the referral to others.

HARVESTING HOPE

Once enrolled, Fuller describes the majority of his new participants exhibiting what he terms "re-entry malaise," where people struggle with their self-worth, settling for their current limitations.

In an open group discussion with Syracuse participants in February, one man shared that "you know you are doing your best, but your best is never enough."

Later, Rivers paused, locking eyes with another grant participant. "We said one day we'd be out," he said while maintaining eye contact. Both walked the yard together and lived in the same cell block, at various prisons, at different points in their pasts. "On those walks, we said we'd have a second chance, and that time is now," Rivers concluded. Next he encouraged the men to share their personal stories in order to illustrate to others what barriers they face in their transition from incarceration to free society.

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS SUPPORT RE-ENTRY EFFORTS?

Because it is our role as citizens.

"Part of the public policy function is building community safety. I think it would be a mistake to think of robust re-entry services as somehow a benefit that is narrowly targeted to formerly incarcerated people. We as a community all benefit from promoting the social integration of people who have been incarcerated. Employers benefit when they hire new workers, community life benefits when those people who have been incarcerated find safe and secure housing and their health is taken care of. In my mind, this is core to the public function, and we pay for those things with taxes."

Bruce Western
Leading academic expert on American incarceration

That discussion was open to all the participants under the grant, but those most open to revealing their past and what struggles they face today were older, explaining they've each had years to think on their past mistakes. Those open to going on record and pairing with a reporter over the next three months ranged in age from mid-30s to late 60s. Their personal accounts contributed to this report on the year-long pilot trial. None currently living in Syracuse public housing attended the open discussion or volunteered to speak to a reporter.

Re-entry support is not all hand-holding, the case managers note. There is a spectrum with some requiring help as minimal as a bus pass to make a job interview. But for others, support offered by a case manager could be in tackling their staggering issues of self-doubt when rejections seem to be at every turn — "no" from a landlord; "no" to callbacks on potential jobs; even "no" to requests to reconcile with an estranged child.

For Loftin, patience is what she stresses to each of her clients. "It takes time to get back to a solid foothold," she tells them. "But when parolees come home from prison, they want everything back immediately."

She adds that society tells them the same thing: Be productive now.

"That's where the frustration comes," Loftin said of her clients' feelings, "and as a case manager that's where I come in and can be advantageous and tell them 'listen,

ON THE SIDE

FUTURE EFFORT

(Continued from Page 22)

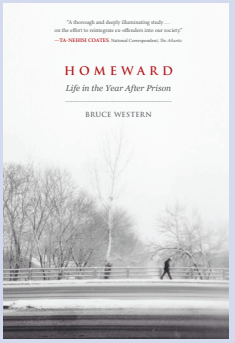
It was in 2010 that Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (FSA), which reduced the sentencing disparity between offenses for crack and powder cocaine from 100:1 to 18:1. "This is still unfair," Comer said. The 100:1 ratio meant people faced longer sentences for offenses involving crack cocaine than for offenses involving the same amount of powder cocaine — though, scientifically, they are two forms of the same drug. Significantly, the majority of people arrested for crack offenses have been African-American. Thus the 100:1 ratio has resulted in vast racial disparities in the average length of sentences for comparable offenses.

Comer explained by looking at his charges: When he was sentenced, 50 grams of crack equaled a life sentence. Today, that would be 4½ years. "These sentences are too harsh," he said.

He believes his experience makes him the ideal person to deliver this message to Congress. His nonprofit will also help others like him find jobs when they return home.

ON THE SIDE

NEW BOOK PUBLISHED



"Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison"

Author: Bruce Western

Pages: 224

Published: May 15, 2018

Cost: $29.95

The book examines how failures of social support trap many people fresh out of prison in a cycle of vulnerability, despite their best efforts to rejoin society.

Accounts from 107 men and 15 women released from the Massachusetts state prison system were part of the study, along with interviews from each probationer's family members.

The perspectives of women are unique to this study, the author says, as they shared specific challenges in re-establishing connections with family, particularly bonding again with their children.

> James Rivers, Charles' uncle who has been off parole since 2010, volunteers each Thursday to help unload and stock the food pantry, which is open to residents from noon to 4:30 p.m. each Thursday. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

it's not going to happen overnight.'"

It takes time.

Lots of time.

Momentum grows slowly, incrementally.

Yet before even tackling their immediate needs, Loftin first wants to know what parole has mandated. "Are they meeting their parole conditions?" she asks, "because that is our top priority. Whatever the commissioner said for you to do upon release — education, drug treatment, counseling — everything else has to be met around those."

She gives an example. Several clients wanted jobs because they felt having money in their pockets was empowering, but if assigned by parole to be in a substance-abuse program four days a week, you first have to complete the program, she says.

This works as good discipline, discouraging hopes of the quick fix. "That hustling mindset," she began, "has to be changed. While those actions may be quick money, they come with greater consequences. Let that patience have its perfect work to get a greater reward."

WHY SHOULD TAXPAYERS SUPPORT RE-ENTRY EFFORTS?

Because it helps with homelessness.

"There is a very, very high incidence of homelessness, especially with people coming home from prison with nowhere to go. So Central New York and (Syracuse) Mayor Ben Walsh are going to have to start finding someplace for these people to go."

Karen Loftin
Re-entry case manager for PEACE

STARTING AGAIN

Fuller has also found this to be a population full of fear. "They are afraid to fail, afraid of rejection," Fuller said. Some he has worked with have such high levels of anxiety and post-traumatic stress that they aren't mentally ready for a group training. Even scheduling a meeting during peak office hours when foot traffic is high is too overwhelming.

In substance-abuse counseling, there's a common saying. "Recovery is the bridge back to life," Fuller said. "But if you've never had much of a life, there's really no point of reference for what you're trying to return to. You never had glory; you never had direction; you never had good counsel."

Deep trauma was the most surprising factor Western learned in the process of interviewing subjects for his book. "The extreme level of violence people have had to contend with over a lifetime," he said, "may seem obvious, but we learned that nearly everyone we spoke to had been seriously victimized by violence."

He noted many had done very violent things themselves, but they also had serious histories of victimization. Despite this, he said, many displayed resilience.

Fuller says in an honest and loving way, a major

component of his role is teaching individuals how to find value in themselves. He said this is something they've been missing. "For some — all of their lives."

Many are scared to death, he added: Scared to go to that job interview, to try, for fear of failing yet again. "Then when we get that spark, we fan it," Fuller said with enthusiasm. He noted that success isn't always employment. "Sometimes success is getting a guy to BOCES to complete a basic course, because sometimes we have to set up wins for them in order to grow their confidence and show them what's possible."

Still he views this as a collaborative effort, not simply him telling them what to do. "They have to be invested," he said "… be part of their own rescue."

UNCERTAIN FATE

Even if the grant is not renewed, Rivers says, PEACE will continue its re-entry efforts. "This is something I've done since I started and something we were doing before the grant," he stressed. "The support I offer is not dependent on this grant continuing."

Neither is the passion the others in this field feel. Loftin, who spent over a decade in prison and has been off parole for 16 years, says serving as a mentor is ingrained to her core. Rivers' and Loftin's past experience, they say, helps to connect with their clients and to show what is possible in the long term. The pair's combination of having both experienced prison makes them uniquely qualified for this work, making their role instrumental in the grant's success. As well, Rivers has earned his master's degree in social services, while Loftin is pursuing her master's.

For housing, grant continuation is a major factor in future approval of a tenant with a criminal background. "A participant's willingness to participate in case management services is an important indicator of their commitment to change," Abdelaziz said.

Currently, three potential enrollees serving out their sentences are in the pipeline to join family in public housing when up for parole. SHA says no decision to approve their move in will be made until a release date is near.

The stall is due to the uncertainty of the grant. If the grant is not renewed, SHA staff would not confirm if their efforts will cease, noting that decisions on individual approval will continue on a case-by-case basis.

"While we want to ensure the case management will be there," Abdelaziz said, "we won't tell people 'no' yet."

Kang completed this story as part of her role as a 2018 John Jay/H.F. Guggenheim Justice Reporting Fellow. Fellows, chosen from a wide pool of applicants, were selected based on editors' recommendations and investigative reporting projects underway.

This piece is set to additionally be published in The Crime Report, a news service covering the diverse challenges and issues in criminal justice.

CHALLENGES TO COMPLETE THIS STORY

Ex-offenders face several barriers in their transition back to society: finding jobs, adequate housing or even obtaining photo identification. So when a new grant was announced to support re-entry locally, I met with the director of the agency in charge to discuss a way to share a deeper understanding on what such support looks like for each participant and what impact it can have on the community.

While those overseeing the grant were excited to showcase the process and success they felt imminent, the former prisoners were reluctant to trust reporters and to open up. For them, declaring their criminal history for publication, even if working to move forward, could be stigmatizing. Some participants under the grant met with a group of reporters to share bits of their re-entry experiences over nearly two hours. Then a few agreed to be paired one-on-one with a reporter over a three-month period to go deeper and share more about their day-to-day challenges. Some stuck with the project; some dropped out. All held objections to some questions and limited reporters' access — in fact, almost always denying it — to their close associates and friends.

There were others we met with re-entry experiences outside of the grant who agreed to speak to us. Personal accounts from four individuals are in the works — though, they, too, have shared little other than to agree to personal interviews and some follow-ups — along with two in-depth stories on the grant's case managers: Charles Rivers and Karen Loftin. Both have personal stories of moving forward successfully from a criminal past. Most of the four have been very open about their pasts, but it's been matched by an equal reluctance to share a lot about how they are getting along now.

Additional challenges have come when leadership at the bureaucratic level restricted what could be shared. Information and understanding of the grant even seemed to be limited among the parties involved. The grant — a partnership between Syracuse Housing Authority, parole and PEACE, Inc. — required coordinated efforts between three agencies that had previously never worked together. This took time to build and was structured from scratch at the local level due to limited guidance provided from the state level.

Then much of the discussions were kept off the record, with permission never given from the top levels. The grant managers in Schenectady and White Plains, where there were pilots like the one in Syracuse, were split on sharing their progress. While Schenectady refused to speak, White Plains was open until April 13, when its policy shifted due to staff changes, restricting staff there to answer follow-up questions. Then a series of contacts and additional staff changes at the state level provided limited updates on the grant renewal.

Despite the bureaucratic red tape, passion for the work from the individuals involved proved to be the driving force in the success of developing and maintaining relationships with the ex-offenders they were serving. While the future of funding this work remains unknown, I have learned that successful re-entry into society requires help from supportive case managers that released offenders can relate to and depend on, people that parolees see as having their best interests at heart.

— Ashley Kang

ON THE SIDE

PERSONAL STORIES

Both Karen Loftin and Charles Rivers, who now advise parolees during their transition period from prison back into the community, spent a combined 30 years behind bars. Their personal stories ring true to many they work with and serve as a model for what is possible. Both shared their accounts in a number of interviews and meetings with Syracuse University reporting students, which will be shared in the coming months online.

Additionally, South Siders with similar transition stories — at varying stages — met with reporters to share what the days, months and years after incarceration are like.

ON THE SIDE

CONTACT HILLSMAN

Joan Hillsman, who moved to Syracuse seven years ago, has received many awards through her work in the community. She usually finds students by going to libraries, churches and other places in the community.

How to contact Hillsman

Visit the Joan Hillsman Music Network at
joanhillsmanmusicnetwork.com

Email:
jhillsman@twcny.rr.com

Call: (315) 373-0805

UPLIFTING FUTURE

Joan Hillsman nurtures young talent, cultural diversity through music

> Joan Hillsman, at the piano, rehearses with children. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photo

By | Bianca Moorman
Staff reporter

Hillsman wins grant for her program to provide lessons and promise for children's futures

Playing the piano helps Raven Ford cope. One Saturday in April at a local church, as she settled behind the keys, the salve was Vanessa Carlton's "A Thousand Miles."

"I like music because it helps me to relax when I am having a bad day," Ford said.

Ford is no stressed-out adult, though. Rather, she's a teen among a bigger group, mostly African-Americans, benefiting from the outreach of Joan Hillsman, a relative newcomer to Syracuse who wants to make a musical — and possibly lifelong — difference for such kids.

Hillsman is a 76-year-old, retired music supervisor of public schools in Washington, D.C., and a musician. She moved to Syracuse seven years ago after her son, Quentin, became the Syracuse University women's basketball coach. Taught at age 6 to play the piano, Hillsman envisions the same for youngsters here.

Through the Joan Hillsman Music Network, she offers lessons to anyone who wants to play the piano or sing. She says her fees are flexible, and community sessions are free. She has been looking for youth talent for 45-plus years.

Hillsman recently won a $1,100 grant from CNY Arts. She has not received the money yet, but noted in her proposal that it would support her focus on youth.

"I thought that I could expand it," she said of her efforts, "that talent needed to be shown, the cultural diversity and how especially in African-American children it can enhance their limits."

In an effort she calls The Talent of Syracuse, Hillsman surveys the community looking for prospects. Her goal: teach them, then provide confidence-building opportunities to perform in the community. An event showcasing youth was scheduled for early May at Hendricks Chapel.

"I found out that there may be a lot of talent, but they may not be getting the exposure that could carry them to another level," said Hillsman, who notes on her website that she worked on projects for former Mayor Stephanie Miner and was involved in the Say Yes to Education nonprofit.

Hillsman says she has coached many gospel singers, and has produced a book, "Gospel Music: An African American Art Form."

She visits local churches and libraries looking for children to participate, and she helps them prepare for performances such as during a Sunday service at Southern Missionary Baptist Church.

Several smiling kids, along with Ford — all under Hillsman's wing on a Saturday in April — seemed to prove her case as they lined up for choir practice, their

teacher positioned at a piano. Destiny Jackson said she likes to play the piano and sing. Another child said playing the violin helps him to relax, just as Ford had said, and yet another said music is expressive. Several noted they play instruments in church; Zuriel Dickerson's instrument is the drums. Some said they liked rock, some classical.

"A lot of them are not getting a lot of opportunity," Hillsman said. "How are they going to move forward instead of being stuck in the same place?"

Hillsman's efforts reflect those of Dick Ford, who for years offered his services to urban youth. He has provided access to instruments to students who otherwise would be left out.

"In my senior years, I wanted to combine being an advocate for music," Ford said. "So I started a program for children in the city of Syracuse, who tend not to go into music because schools have a large dropout rate (and) kids aren't making the progress they are hoping to make."

Ford said he wants to make sure that kids are not living in a fantasy world, and he wants them to consider the next level in life by helping them identify realistic goals.

"The kids have to understand that I am preparing them for college as a musician, not anything else," he said. "If that's what you want, I will work with you," said Ford, noting that some don't understand the concept of practice.

Ford said he helped 32 of his students enroll in music schools at Syracuse University, Ithaca College, SUNY schools, Onondaga Community College and others. He said many have gone on to become successful professional musicians and music teachers, and others might not have chosen music as a career but still play on the side. Among those emerging from his ranks: Malik Clanton and Eveny Parker, who are music teachers, and Danielle Evans (known as Danielle Patrice as a performer), who is a professional jazz singer.

Hillsman said it is best to start children out early in something that is called Kindermusik, which has its origins in Japan. There, parents start their kids out in a process called the Suzuki Method, where children as young as 2 learn to play. Hillsman said this kind of exposure to music is difficult in urban communities, and especially so for African-Americans. She said by the time youngsters get nurturing, it might be too late.

"Unfortunately, in African-American cultures, it was not affordable to get music lessons. Many have the concept that I will not start that early," Hillsman said.

Sarah Gentile, supervisor of fine arts in the Syracuse City School District, acknowledged that when budget cuts do happen, they usually affect urban communities and schools where minorities may be the majority. In city schools, that's the case. According to the Syracuse City School District: 53 percent of the students are black; 12 percent are Hispanic; 6 percent are Asian; 1 percent are Native American; and 28 percent are white.

"Music is important for all youth," Gentile said. "Unfortunately, urban students are the first to get cuts from their programming. They are often not given the same experiences as their non-urban counterparts."

Gentile said that so far the district has protected music programs from cuts, and it offers music education as well as a summer arts program. In the high schools, there are musical theater programs and concerts.

Gentile said there has been an increase in the teaching of instrumental music: In grades 4-12, there are 2,500 students in the instrumental music program, and that's the number of instruments provided. They include violins, clarinets, flutes, trumpets, saxophones and percussion instruments such as drums.

For grades K-8 and as an elective at the high school level, general music education classes are offered. In these classes, students learn about music from different countries and how to sing, but they don't learn to play instruments. Gentile said keyboards are provided to students in this program.

Gentile said instruments are provided to students for free, whereas students used to rent them.

Ford said that he starts children out when they are older, 12 or 13, because they have longer attention spans. He said that this allows them to continue with music instead of quitting due to frustration.

"Kids don't get encouraged to practice," Ford said. "They are too young to figure out how to practice, and they quit."

Gentile said children build self-confidence through music, and Ford and Hillsman said it's a mix of all subjects, such as math, physics and writing.

Hillsman noted that it's a positive way for kids to do something in their community.

"It gives them an outlet in which they can build social skills," Hillsman said.

And for her?

"It is not about me," Hillsman said. "It is about what I can do with the community."

> Raven Ford plays piano. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photo

ON THE SIDE

MUSIC REPORT

In a report that was released by the **National Association of Music Merchants** (NAMM), data showed that urban schools offered fewer music programs and students had less access to them.

The report also noted that its online **survey revealed**:

76 percent of African-American parents and **75 percent of Hispanic** parents were likely to enroll their children in school music classes where they exist, compared to **67 percent of white** parents.

CNY ARTS

Stephen Butler of CNY Arts said that even though the organization doesn't provide direct funding to the schools, it does provide grants to individuals like Joan Hillsman.

"Statistically we know that music is very good for early childhood education," Butler said. "It improves vocabulary and memory in children."

ON THE SIDE

FINDING MEANING

The Stand has spoken to Rashawn Sullivan on multiple occasions in the past. Here's some of what he's told The Stand before:

- "I, now, believe Jason's death was a sacrifice for me to bring a level of awareness to the world about being apologetic and about the damage that violence can do not only to yourself, but to individuals and to your families."
- "I overcame darkness and ignorance through a situation that appeared to be bad on the surface. I believe everything happens according to a divine plan, and Jason was part of that."
- "People don't know what it means to apologize. They think they do, but they don't. If you've done something wrong to someone, just make an open apology."

— Source: mysouthsidestand.com

A BRIDGE TO HELP

Rashawn Sullivan is described as effective because 'his story is real'

> Rashawn Sullivan spent 17 years at correctional facilities, and he has used his past as a learning experience for members of his community. | Jack Henkels, Staff Photo

By | Jack Henkels
The Stand reporter

Former inmate, who knows the addictions of street life, teaches others how to avoid same fate

Since being released from the Cayuga Correctional Facility in 2015, Syracuse South Sider Rashawn Sullivan has emerged as a powerful role model to both the youth and the adults of his community.

"Street life is addicting," Sullivan said, in a recent interview. "I'm now someone who goes into the streets and talks to individuals on the corners about the addictive behavior and how it can blind them from the consequences of being in the streets."

Sullivan fell victim to that street life in 1997 when he killed Jason Crawford in a drive-by shooting. He spent 17 years at various correctional facilities, but now, he's making efforts to ensure that teens and young adults in the Syracuse area don't fall into that same trap.

This spring, Syracuse University provided space at Peck Hall on East Genesee Street for Sullivan to run workshops where people could hear his story firsthand. Local youth, relatives of victims of violence and some of Sullivan's former inmates attended and listened to him talk about apologizing and forgiveness, while also providing a bridge for professional help.

"Our therapy services are open to anybody, anytime," said Tracey Reichert Schimpf, the director of clinical services at SU who has been working with Sullivan for about a year.

According to Schimpf, the workshops provide members of the community an opportunity to seek help. If an individual attends one of his workshops and decides that therapy might be helpful, Sullivan is able to connect them with Schimpf and SU's services.

Schimpf said Sullivan's believability is his key attribute.

"He's been there. His story is real. He gets the pressure," Schimpf said. "I'm a therapist and I'm associated with academia. Kids aren't going to listen to me in the same way."

Alec Zoida is a teacher at Cicero-North Syracuse High School who echoes Schimpf's sentiments.

"He can actually talk to students about what it's like to be behind bars," Zoida said. "Not many people are able to do that, and I think it's good for students who think they're indestructible because this sort of thing could happen to them."

Zoida said that anything a police officer, teacher or therapist like Schimpf could say to teens and young adults isn't going to ring true the way it would coming from Sullivan, someone who has actually lived that reality.

When he was released, Sullivan said his initial plan was to just apologize to the Crawford family. From there, he started his "iApologize" campaign, which encompasses all of his different efforts in the community. He's written a book, "iApologize," and he's working on a second one that will focus on his transformation from behind bars to community activist. He has started visiting local correctional facilities, including a few where he was once incarcerated, to give presentations to the inmates to inspire them to use the time behind bars wisely.

"You can learn from your poor decision while also getting college-like programs under your belt, and then bring that information into society and then apply it, because it works," Sullivan said. "I'm just a living testimony that it can be done if you take the proper steps."

This summer, Sullivan will work on two major projects. First, he wants to replace littered liquor bottles at memorial sites for victims of violence with newly planted trees.

"I noticed that through the city of Syracuse, people weren't really honoring the dead. And it was reflected through the memorial sites," Sullivan said. Liquor bottles carry a negative connotation because of what alcohol can do to your health and community, and Sullivan said he wants to replace them with young trees, which are symbolic of growth and new life.

"The victim's family would actually participate in the process of planting the trees and putting whatever other positive object that they want to put down there, whether it's a teddy bear or flowers, candles, balloons," Sullivan said. "Anything that represents positivity and life."

Sullivan has been working in conjunction with the Onondaga Earth Corps to clean up existing memorial sites, to find empty plots of land for new ones, and also to provide the trees.

For his second summer project, Sullivan intends to revamp his iApologize beautification project. Each Saturday, Sullivan, with the help of local community members, will pick an area of town to spruce up and pick up litter.

"It's all about beautifying the community and when that happens, people tend to have more respect for it," Sullivan said. "I started doing it two years ago, but other things came up and I kind of had to push with those other ideas. But it's definitely something that I'm going to get back to this summer."

Even Sullivan says that he's blown away by the chances he has had in just three years out of prison to improve his community and make a difference.

"I didn't think that it would start to expand like this, or these different types of opportunities would come along this fast," Sullivan said. "Initially I just wanted to clear the air with the Crawford family, but then other things just kept coming from it."

CONTACT SULLIVAN

To find out more about the iApologize campaign, visit: iApologize315.com

Email:
Rashawnspeaks3@gmail.com

ON THE SIDE

ON THE SIDE

JOIN OUR WALK

What: Ninth annual South Side Photo Walk

When: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, July 28

Where: Meet at the Eat to Live Food Cooperative, 2323 S. Salina St.

Details: Event will open with a photo lesson by professional photographers, followed by a walk through the neighborhood to capture a typical day on the South Side. After the walk, all participants will share their photos, and the best shots will be published in the September print issue of The Stand. Additionally, images will be included in a future photo exhibition.

Cost: Free and open to all ages of any skill level

To reserve a camera: Cameras are available for loan, but the number is limited. To request to borrow a camera, contact Ashley Kang at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054

More info.: Visit mysouthsidestand.com

THE STAND IN ITALY

South Side paper's efforts featured at International Journalism Festival

> SU's Greg Munno presents the Photo Walk during a panel at the International Journalism Festival. | Provided Photo by Jeff Collet, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication

By | Greg Munno
The Stand

Journalism professionals from around the world take notice of annual South Side Photo Walk

The Stand is huge in Italy.

Really, it is. The reporters, academics and industry professionals who met in Perugia, Italy, in April for the International Journalism Festival were full of praise for The Stand and its approach to community journalism.

Many people who attended the festival are interested in finding ways to build bridges between people of disparate backgrounds — white and black, rich and poor, conservative and liberal.

This interest stems from growing and measurable divides among people that started well before the 2016 election and that exist in countries around the world. One group at the festival keenly interested in countering this trend has created a grant program called Finding Common Ground.

Stand Director Ashley Kang discovered this grant, and she realized immediately that The Stand's annual Photo Walk does just that: It brings people to the South Side who might not otherwise visit to meet residents and together explore the beauty and charm of the neighborhood.

The grant administrators — the Agora Journalism Center — saw the power in the Photo Walk, as well as the ability for other community newspapers to do something similar. They awarded the grant to The Stand, which will use it to buy new cameras, hire more photo trainers, provide lunch during the summer Photo Walk, and help our friends in Grahamstown, South Africa, start their own Photo Walk. The Stand also plans a show to display photos from the walk.

Agora and its generous funders — the Robert Bosch Stiftung (Foundation) and the News Integrity Initiative — then partnered with the International Journalism Festival to bring all the winners of the grant

to the festival so we could meet one another and present our work to a larger audience.

Other winners included a project in Germany that pairs older Germans who experienced displacement during World War II with newer arrivals displaced by war in the Middle East; a project in London that has used investigative reporting on domestic violence to create and stage a play on that topic; and a public radio show in Alaska that hosts dialogues between prisoners and those on the outside.

In talking about The Stand and the Photo Walk in Italy, it became clear how much people admired professor Steve Davis' idea of creating a newspaper of, by and for the residents of a neighborhood too often ignored (and misrepresented) by the mainstream media.

Don't miss this year's Photo Walk to participate in something that now has fans around the globe. We are likely to be joined by another grant winner, as the funders want us all to continue to get to know one another and to cross-pollinate ideas.

Participants in the Photo Walk always come away with a new appreciation for the South Side. And if those at the festival are right, you'll also be helping to create much-needed bridges to better connect us all.

> Greg Munno gives a presentation at the International Journalism Festival with two other grant winners: Maeve McClenaghan from the United Kingdom and Karolis Vysniauskas from Lithuania. On the screen behind them are photos published in The Stand from the annual South Side Photo Walk. | Provided Photo

Greg Munno, who attended the journalism festival in Italy, is a professor at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and is the incoming adviser to The Stand

ON THE SIDE

LOCAL EVENT

What: 39th annual Freedom Fund Awards Dinner

When: 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday, June 7

Where: Holiday Inn Syracuse-Liverpool, 441 Electronics Parkway

Details: Join the Syracuse chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for an evening of recognition and reflection

Cost: VIP reception and dinner: $125 per person/ $240 per couple. Dinner only: $85/$160

More info: Visit syracusenaacp.com

the STAND
south side newspaper project

Saturday
July
28
2018

Photo Walk

10 a.m.
to
3 p.m.

Photo lesson followed by
Photo Walk through the neighborhood

A limited number of cameras available to borrow; contact The Stand to learn more

Catered Lunch provided

To register:

Email

ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

or call (315) 882-1054

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

2018 Finding COMMON Ground Awardee

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