

## 2016 ABOG Fellows Mark Strandquist and Courtney Bowles

### *The Reentry Think Tank: Philadelphia, PA*

Field Research Report

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#### Context

The number of people across our country with criminal records tops 70 million. Philadelphia residents do no better than the nation as a whole, with one out of five Philadelphians saddled with criminal convictions. Despite their significant numbers, these returning citizens not only face hurdles to obtaining employment, housing, and educational opportunities, but also frequently are the most marginalized people in our society. The Reentry Think Tank Fellowship aims to change that.

Courtney Bowles and Mark Strandquist have worked in the arts for years and have found ways to engage the people who are preparing for reentry while incarcerated or are reentering after incarceration. They believe all community and political stakeholders need to hear from people who have experienced incarceration and reentry firsthand. Each of their prior projects has produced meaningful public art and advocacy. This project is no different.

The funding source for this project is A Blade of Grass (ABOG), which provides resources and other forms of support to artists through fellowships. Their mission is to “foster inclusive and practical discourse about the aesthetics, function, ethics and meaning of socially engaged art that resonates within and outside the contemporary art dialogue.” Courtney and Mark are 2016 recipients of an ABOG Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art, which recognizes artists who shape, organize and lead art-related initiatives “in partnership with communities, in ways that are relevant in everyday life, at ambitious scale, to enact social change.”

Within this framework, Mark and Courtney began in fall 2016 to put into effect *The Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank* (Think Tank) to “use art events to connect [ . . . ] those most affected by the criminal justice system with those in power,” and ultimately forge lasting partnerships. The Think Tank focused primarily on directing and creating media campaigns and art installations to deepen community understanding, holding forums with stakeholders featuring the fellows’ art, poetry and short films, and collaborating with the Defender Association of Philadelphia to encourage more effective advocacy for indigent citizens facing criminal charges.

Over the course of one year, [\*The Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank\*](#) brought together formerly incarcerated individuals and artists, advocates, and reentry sector stakeholders. The collaborations resulted in powerful photos, films, mobile murals, and media campaigns to shift public opinion and meaningfully engage service providers and policy makers. The Think Tank simultaneously worked with reentry sector stakeholders, including the Defender Association of Philadelphia, to understand the system and co-design solutions to urgent reentry needs.

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This report highlights the art and activities from the Spring 2017 Fellowship and the collaboration with the Defender Association of Philadelphia.

### Background

Mark and Courtney used a portion of their ABOG grant to create an expanded set of fellowships for reentering citizens. This became the *Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank*. They asked the leadership at organizations that were members of the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition to choose one person to represent the city's reentry community as a Think Tank Fellow. Each Fellow was provided with a small grant and expected at weekly Think Tank meetings, monthly stakeholder events, popup art exhibits, and conferences. Eventually, the fellows also worked in partnership with and provided consultation to one key stakeholder.

Mark and Courtney funded five fellows in the fall, from September to December of 2016, and ten in the spring, including several returning fellows, from February to May of 2017. The fellows' weekly meetings included brainstorming about projects, producing art and poetry, and advertising and organizing participation in over one dozen community and stakeholder events.

The Spring 2017 fellows and their corresponding organizations are:

Jay Adams — [Institute for Community Justice](#)

Anthony Lovett — Mural Arts Program

Aaron Crump — TCRC (The Center for Returning Citizens)

Jym Baker — CCP (Community College of Philadelphia) Reentry Support Project

Faith Bartley — [People's Paper Co-op](#) at the Village of Arts & Humanities

Colwin Williams — MENTOR (Mentors Empowering Now to Overcome Recidivism)

Josh Glenn — [YASP](#) (Youth Arts & Self-Empowerment Project)

Anthony Hirschbuhl — Goldring Reentry Initiative at University of Pennsylvania

Sheila Michael — RISE (The Mayor's Office of Reintegration Services for Ex-offenders)

Deanna Bell — Center for Carceral Communities, an initiative of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice

The Philadelphia Reentry Coalition has been an essential partner in connecting Mark and Courtney to its members and to returning citizens who work with members of the coalition. The Coalition includes over eighty public service providers, nonprofits, and city agencies and is led by Director Aviva Tevah. Aviva is working to increase collaboration and partnerships among members, and increase communications and strengthen funding and implementation strategies. The Coalition's goals include using the expertise of reentering citizens to support programs. In furtherance of this goal, the Coalition highlighted Mark and Courtney's idea for a think tank and asked members to nominate representatives to serve as fellows.

Additionally, the Coalition provided critical support for a sustained collaboration with a key stakeholder. The opportunity for collaboration with the Think Tank was advertised to Philadelphia Reentry Coalition members on January 18, 2017. Applicants who wished to collaborate with the Think Tank applied by submitting possible solutions to problems a group of returning citizens could help the organization solve. Specifically,

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the applicant's proposed project had to be centered on issues impacting reentering citizens and answer one of the following questions:

- Do you need help making a service more empowering, generative, and relevant?
- Do you need help creating media campaigns about a certain issue?
- Do you need help designing policies or initiatives and need meaningful feedback?

After considering each application, and each organization's commitment and capacity for affecting change, the Think Tank formally partnered with the Defender Association of Philadelphia. The idea was to employ the Reentry Fellows' expertise to improve the experience for those in the criminal justice system in meaningful ways.

By the end of the fellowship, the Think Tank Fellows, with the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition and their sustained collaboration partner, the Defender Association of Philadelphia, had created banners, posters, poetry, films, and narratives for pop-up art displays all over the city, as well as a Client's Bill of Rights and a Resume for Freedom for the clients of the Defender Association of Philadelphia, all while leading discussions at reentry conferences and summits at universities, clinics, courts, and detention centers.

### Art and Reentry

Our country has successfully embraced art and art education as a form of rehabilitation and reentry at several points in our history. In the 1950s and 1960s, one element of rehabilitation was the institutionalization of prison libraries.<sup>1</sup> These libraries were meant to create individual opportunities for personal growth and literary skills. Starting in 1972, inmates were offered the opportunity to obtain an education, in some cases including baccalaureate and post-graduate education, which led to city-funded evidence-based studies on the positive or negative effects of arts and literature programs.

During that time, the government also provided funding to hire unemployed or underemployed workers in community service. This led many local and state arts councils and organizations to employ artists in schools, museums, prisons, jails, detention centers, hospitals, and rural communities. One of the early studies, undertaken by the American Correctional Association (ACA), underwrote twenty-one successful prison arts programs selected with evaluations in place.

Research shows that participation in a diverse array of art projects consistently resulted in significantly improved positive outcomes. This held true both for participants who made art while in the correctional system and those who participated upon release.<sup>2</sup>

In one example, a study of four California prison arts programs reported improved self-confidence, stress levels and interpersonal relationships.<sup>3</sup> The art forms utilized were poetry, theater, visual arts, and writing.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Oregon-rev.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Brewster, L. (2014). California Prison Arts: A Quantitative Evaluation. Santa Cruz, CA: William James Association.

<http://williamjamesassociation.org/california-prison-arts-evaluation-2014/>

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The sponsors included The Actors' Gang, Arts-in-Corrections (AIC), Jail Guitar Doors, Marin Shakespeare, Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, and William James Association. AIC was one of the first prisons arts program in the nation, operating from 1977–1981, and from 1981–2003. Individual and group instruction offered included the visual, performing, literary, and media arts.

Pre- and post-test survey results of inmates with no previous arts education or practice showed a statistically significant correlation between participation and improved time management, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, active initiative, and self-confidence. A significant majority of former AIC inmates attributed the arts program with giving them greater confidence and self-discipline to pursue other academic and vocational opportunities. Participants who participated for two or more years also showed improvement in social competence and emotional control. Additionally, 58% of arts program participants said art brought them closer to their loved ones, enriched their conversations and nurtured a new identity as artist rather than convict.

There are also studies verifying the benefits of community art projects upon reentry, including one study of the Changing Lives Through Literature program through University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.<sup>4</sup> This program sought to build self-esteem by enhancing communication skills, sharpening analytical skills, and providing a forum for discussing personal concerns. Participants met every other week on a university campus to discuss literature, while also attending separate group discussions for the duration of the program. The readings and discussions mirrored themes they may have been dealing with in their own lives, such as violence, masculinity, and individual identity. The study found a reconviction rate of 18.75% in the study group compared with 45% in control group. Additionally, participants reported that the program resulted in long-term positive impact.

Along with support from studies, the idea of using art as a method of engaging, healing, and increasing empathy enjoys wide public support.<sup>5</sup> Societal access to the arts is supported and subsidized by government, foundations, and private industry.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, while we generally accept that making, sharing, seeing, and discussing art helps us feel more connected to our communities,<sup>7</sup> Courtney and Mark recognized that, as artists, they could use art to help reentering citizens share their singular perspectives in ways that expand the conversation about the criminal justice system and the challenges faced after release.

The Philadelphia Reentry Coalition described the artwork created by the Think Tank as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Jarjoura, R. G., & Krumholz, S. T. (1998). Combining Bibliotherapy and Positive Role Modeling as an Alternative to Incarceration. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 28 (1/2), 127-139. <http://ctl.umassd.edu/programsresults1a.cfm>.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2015/feb/12/creative-ways-artists-improve-communities>; see also <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/why-art-has-the-power-to-change-the-world/> and <https://www.svcc.edu/academics/classes/murray/hum210/artcul.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/publications/how-united-states-funds-arts> which cites to <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/how-the-us-funds-the-arts.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2804629/> stating, “we have seen positive outcomes for the potential of using art to promote healing in 4 primary areas of focus.”

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By using art as a forum for civic dialogue, the exhibit speaks to the many barriers and challenges returning citizens face [and] . . . aims to change the narrative and public opinion about reentry by presenting art shaped directly by . . . returning citizens . . . Art serves as a powerful and necessary tool to engage people, amplify voices otherwise [without] public or political platforms . . . and destroy stereotypes . . . creating avenues for compassion [and] connection.

### **Preamble to the Client's Bill of Rights**

The Think Tank wrote their Preamble as part of weekly meetings in the fall of their fellowship. The Preamble became the Think Tank's signature message in its central mission of deepening community understanding of reentering citizens. It was used in posters, banners and radio shows, and recited at presentations. This is the text, in its entirety:

We the people.

The other side of America.

The 70 million plus with criminal records.

We exist in multitudes. We lead many lives.

We are 23, 57, 35 years old.

We are not criminals. We are survivors. Scholars. Artists. The leaders you need.  
Your fathers, Mothers, Daughters, sons. We are human beings. We deserve a chance to prove our worth.

We did our time. Let us become who we want to be.

Believe in me and I will be the best mother I never had. I will mobilize communities. Will make history. Will achieve all of my goals. Will be a role model for the youth!

But it's not black and white.

Some of us came home to housing. Some of us were homeless. Some spent 7 months trying to get an approved home plan while wasting away in halfway houses. Some of us struggle finding positive support from family and friends, while others came home to mentors, wives, husbands, and so many open arms.

I want you to remember that we need to change people's environment if we want to change their future. That people need community, not condemnation. That we need more support to become what we dream of.

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That the world is wrong about us. That we've already come so far. That we need to forgive us.  
And so do you. That we can make differences in the lives of others. But we need a chance to  
prove our worth.

That we are powerful!

### **People's Paper Co-op Art Initiative**

Among many other events, conferences, and meetings, the Think Tank has taken part in ongoing city-wide legal clinics. Fellows organize and partner with civil rights lawyers through Community Legal Services and the Philadelphia Bar Association to co-facilitate a series of clinics that expunge the records of hundreds of Philadelphians. At each event, the Think Tank Fellows work to transform service spaces into welcoming and empowering organizing spaces. The walls of each clinic are covered with supportive posters made by Think Tank fellows, and the fellows share their own stories to inspire those in attendance to do the same through a multitude of interactive art projects that meld peer-led research strategies with interactive art experiences. They do so by working with clinic participants to produce art, audio, and writing that will be attached together to unite the Think Tank's various campaigns.

One clinic event was held in collaboration with Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity. In partnership with the People's Paper Co-op, beginning in 2014, the legal services group began assisting people in obtaining expungements of their eligible prior records and subsequently using the paper that those prior records were printed on to create art. Courtney, Mark, and the Think Tank Fellows participated in the clinics as part of their fellowship and were able to transform deflating prior convictions into empowering art. After obtaining their expungements, people created new art by shredding the prior conviction printouts, making pulp from them, and then creating new paper.

The paper was filled with "reverse mugshots." Mark Strandquist described these unique portraits:

All photographs tell stories, but a mugshot, like a criminal record, tells the same story about a person over and over again, regardless of what happens before or after an arrest. The reverse mugshots are new, Polaroid portraits that participants create in response to the question: "When people look at your criminal record, what about you as a human being don't they see?" These candid portraits, where participants control the narrative, are embedded into a new sheet of paper made from their shredded and pulped criminal records.

In addition to the photos, people's poignant answers to the questions that help expand our community's understanding of reentering citizens are embedded in the artwork. Some answers include:

I'm a kind and selfless guy, and I try hard to do the right thing  
I'm a pillar in my community; still trying  
I can change  
They don't see the real me

I'm a loving mother, sister, community member  
That I'm witty

### **Pop-up Art Installation at University of Pennsylvania Law Library**

Over the course of the Fellowship, the Think Tank has displayed the art created at "pop-up" art exhibits. The exhibits have traveled to detention centers, museums, galleries, church basements, legal clinics, and universities. My first introduction to the art and creative message of Think Tank came from my visit to University of Pennsylvania's Law Library.

The University of Pennsylvania Law School explained the impact of the exhibits:

[Criminal] records create obstacles to employment, housing, education, healthcare, and social mobility, while stigmatizing and shackling people to their past . . . but also position those with criminal records as the reentry experts[.]

The Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank connect[s] returning citizens with the region's top artists, civil rights lawyers, and other community experts to transform the stereotypes, social services, and policies that impact their lives[.]

[It features] . . . the powerful words and images of the Think Tank Fellows, returning citizens from reentry programs around the city, who have been recognized for their exceptional work, and nominated to be a part of the Think Tank.

The art installation was displayed on both levels of University of Pennsylvania's Biddle Law Library in March of 2017. Upon entry into the library, a large banner with the words "We The People" painted across the top was the first work of art students would encounter, depicting a road flowing outward from the letters and widening through the banner. To the left and right of the path are black and white and sepia toned photographs of returning citizens' faces edged in bright colors. The people were all ages and genders. The banner has since had the words to the Preamble added to it.

This eye-catching banner was followed by poster board displays, including one asking, "Want to meet Philly's top reentry experts?" and showing several Reentry Think Tank Fellows. Additionally, there were large banners across the railing on the top level of the library. The words on the photos were in response to a series of prompts. These works of art arose out of weekly poetry writing sessions. The work was edited and assembled together to create the Preamble. In each banner, the photos had the Fellow's written response superimposed over the photo they created. Answers included what ultimately formed part of the Preamble.

The works of art powerfully demonstrated each artist's creative vision, individual voice, and his or her connection to the entire community. And the depth of feeling in the photographs was amplified in the library's quiet and introspective setting. As a viewer, I found the exhibit left me feeling uplifted by the messages, and connected to the people behind the works of art.

### **Events**

In addition to the Preamble and a sizeable number of works of art, the Think Tank also created a Client's Bill

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of Rights and a Resume for Freedom, discussed further below. Through their participation at these events, the Think Tank expanded the understanding of a broad group of stakeholders and criminal justice professionals by sharing their unique perspective and teaching them about themselves and other returning citizens. They utilized their artistry and expertise to engage decision makers and grow awareness of the challenges to reentry in and around Philadelphia. The breadth of their community engagement is reflected in this calendar of events:

### **October 2017 — Present**

The People's Paper Co-op partnered with MSW students from University of Pennsylvania for weekly Walk-In Reentry Services programs in North Philadelphia where reentering citizens meet with social workers and obtain assistance with resumes, job applications, and counseling.

**October 1, 2016** — The Reentry Think Tank participated in expungement intake at The Village of Arts & Humanities with Community Legal Services.

**October 19, 2017** — The Reentry Think Tank did a presentation and pop-up exhibit at the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition Meeting.

**November 12, 2016** — Citywide Expungement Day was held at six locations across the city, with lawyers expunging the records of over 1,200 people. Think Tank and Co-op Fellows set up pop-up exhibits, attended clinics at four locations, interacted with hundreds of individuals, and collected responses about the Client's Bill of Rights. The participants who had records expunged and gave feedback to fellows helped provide some of the information that formed the basis for the final document produced in collaboration with the Defender Association and discussed further below.

**December 6, 2016** — The People's Paper Co-op held its Holiday Cards to Prisoners program at Temple University's Contemporary Gallery. Think Tank Fellows in attendance worked with community members to create handmade cards from shredded criminal records for people who were incarcerated. Reentering citizens, their families, and advocates also discussed the importance of correspondence while in custody.

**February 25, 2017** — The Think Tank participated in an expungement clinic at the Community College of Philadelphia.

**March 2017** — The Think Tank began its formal collaboration with the Defender Association of Philadelphia focused on how Think Tank Fellows could help transform the way public defenders work with clients. The Think Tank connected with Mark Houldin and other defenders to help clients understand their rights, help lawyers look beyond criminal records, and advocate for a more just legal system.

**March 18, 2017** — The Think Tank participated in an expungement clinic at the Village of Arts and Humanities.

**March 22–March 29, 2017** — The Think Tank installed pop-up exhibits across University of Pennsylvania.

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**March 29, 2017** — Think Tank Fellows led a powerful and engaging dialogue at Slought,<sup>8</sup> a Philadelphia nonprofit that engages the public in dialogue about cultural and socio-political change. After presentations on the Think Tank, fellows engaged the group in honest and urgent conversations about the biggest hurdles to success. The groups identified mental health, employment, housing, pre-release support, education, and lack of knowledge of the systems as key obstacles.

**April 26, 2017** — The Think Tank presented a pop-up exhibit and presentation at the Federal Detention Center. The Fellows used the pop-up exhibit to transform the space by covering the walls with the Think Tank's photos, poems, and banners, and re-arranging parts of the room. The Detention Center's Warden, top staff and leadership, and many others attended. The Think Tank Fellows were dressed in work attire and sat among the Federal Detention Center professionals.

When the lights were turned on, the fellows stood up and recited the opening lines of the Preamble. Because the fellows were not identified until they rose to recite the Preamble, during the course of the recitation, there was a shift in the level of awareness and emotion in the room. All participants were able to hear the voices, dreams, and demands of the fellows in a transformed physical space. The event ended with each fellow speaking about what they wanted those in attendance to remember. Several attendees mentioned afterwards how moved they were by the event.

**May 2–3, 2017** — The Think Tank Fellows attended the 3rd Circuit Federal Courts Summit conference and shared their pop-up exhibit with judges, prosecutors, staff, and defenders from Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland.

**May 6, 2017** — The Reentry Think Tank also participated in the Breaking Down the Walls Summit sponsored by University of Pennsylvania's Goldring Reentry Initiative and the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. The Think Tank's event began with the pop-up exhibit and screening some of the Think Tank's mini-documentaries. As at the Federal Detention Center, when the films ended, the lights came on and Think Tank Fellows sitting among the attendees rose to recite the Preamble to the Bill of Rights. The event ended with a panel discussion about their experiences as reentering citizens and ongoing efforts to transform reentry services in Philadelphia.

### Upcoming Events

**June 2, 2017** — VOICES Exhibit: Exhibition Opening  
Painted Bride Gallery, 230 Vine St, Philadelphia, PA 19106

**June 10, 2017** — Women In Reentry Day  
Village of Arts and Humanities, 2544 Germantown Ave, 19133  
The People's Paper Co-op is hosting Philadelphia's first annual symposium and art exhibit in support of women impacted by the criminal justice system. The day will include a symposium, resource fair, and preview of the art for service providers, advocates, artists, and women in reentry. All artwork featured will be created by women in reentry in collaboration with local and national artists.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://slought.org>

**June 12–July 28, 2017** — Rethinking Reentry Through Art

Exhibit outside of the Philadelphia Mayor’s office at City Hall

The Think Tank’s installation is part of the summer 2017 Art in City Hall exhibit in honor of June as Reentry Awareness Month. “*Rethinking Reentry Through Art* is a project of the Reentry Coalition and our partners The Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank, The Mural Arts Restorative Justice Program, Institute for Community Justice, Right of Return USA, the Youth Art & Self-Empowerment Project, Eastern State Penitentiary, and The Reentry Project.” This event will mark the culmination of one year of work by the Think Tank Fellows.

**June 28, 2017** — Beyond the Walls: Prison Healthcare and Reentry Summit

Pennsylvania Convention Center

### Defender Collaboration

At the first of three Think Tank meetings I attended, the focus was on the collaboration with the Defender Association of Philadelphia (Defender). The Defender’s representative at Think Tank meetings was Policy Director and an Assistant Defender Mark Houldin. The group was working on a Resume for Freedom, a Client’s Bill of Rights, and ways to use the Think Tank’s reentry expertise at the Defender’s offices.

In prior meetings, the group had discussed what it means to be a just lawyer, as well as what experiences the fellows had had with their public defenders and the criminal justice system. In the course of the discussions, the group decided one area of focus should be the need for lawyers to better understand not only the people they represented, but also the extent to which their clients are impacted by the possibility of imprisonment. The group began to develop a supplemental pre-interview process to be used at the Defender offices that would humanize the person facing charges. They also decided on the first interview as an opportunity to provide mentorship to potential defender clients. The Think Tank’s expertise and perspective allowed the fellows to begin assembling questions for an alternative resume with positively focused questions that went beyond the Defender’s routine intake forms used during the first interview.

At the April 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting I attended, with the alternative resume well underway, fellows expanded on their thoughts about public defenders and how they represent people across the city. One fellow wanted defense attorneys to “look at the person” before reading the documents. Another wanted to see defenders provide more transparency to help raise morale in the communities they served, while a third fellow felt public defenders needed to understand that each person’s freedom was on the line and to treat people like people, not numbers.

The fellows were surprised to hear about the rigorous three-tiered interview process for the selection of Defender attorneys and the commitment and skill a candidate needs to exhibit to be hired as a public defender. Some fellows were not even aware that every Philadelphia public defender was an attorney. In addition to providing answers to questions during the discussion about public defenders, Mark Houldin acknowledged that for all the training provided by the Defender offices, the attorneys were not trained on things like “how it looks to be talking to the DA” while waiting for a matter to be called in the courtroom, or how to convey empathy to people facing criminal charges.

## Resume for Freedom

Every fellow contributed to what came to be called a Resume for Freedom. With input from the Defender office, the document became a set of questions highlighting community and family connections and asking those who had been appointed a public defender to highlight their positive attributes and personal strengths. Intended to paint a more complete picture of the person in ways that the standard Defender interview form does not, the Resume for Freedom also forced the person completing it to think beyond the acts that resulted in arrest. The ultimate objective was to enable defense attorneys to relate in more human ways to their clients and represent the whole person in the process. Questions include:

- What kind of positive things have you done in your past, and what are you doing today?
- Name three things you need to stay out of jail and live a crime-free life.
- Do you have stable housing?
- What are three things people don't see about you when they look at your criminal record?

As discussed further below, the Resume for Freedom was utilized in a pilot project wherein the Think Tank Fellows encouraged people awaiting interviews with their public defenders to complete it, and the Defender then included it in the case file for each client.

## Client's Bill of Rights

As they were formulating the questions for the Resume for Freedom, the group simultaneously began writing a set of basic rights, called a Client's Bill of Rights, along with a Preamble, in early March. The process continued until May 15<sup>th</sup> and allowed fellows to articulate how they would ideally want to be treated by their lawyers. For example, one fellow shared how frightening it was to see her public defender chatting and laughing with the District Attorney just before her case was called in court years ago. Her concerns were articulated in the Client's Bill of Rights as, "I deserve a lawyer who knows my life is on the line." With input from Mark Houldin, the group also formulated rights that closely follow the Pennsylvania Rules of Professional Conduct requirements. For example, the right to competent counsel is incorporated into the Client's Bill of Rights as: "I deserve a lawyer who is devoted to my case and has the knowledge, skills and thoroughness to represent me."

Other fellows also raised concerns about violations of their rights. One fellow recalled that his public defender did not do enough to get his witnesses to court for trial. Another remembered his public defender pushing him to plead guilty because of the possibility that he could face stiffer punishment if he lost at trial. He felt he was able to push back and go to trial only because he was participating in an unrelated leadership class. In response, Mark Houldin suggested including a client's right to a thorough and complete investigation in the Bill of Rights.

The development of the Client's Bill of Rights was a product of several months of this kind of in-depth exchange that moved forward as a result of the sincere respect and synergy within the group. The meetings accomplished a great deal, in no small part because of Mark and Courtney's leadership and compassion at every step. At several meetings, they heard fellows describe childhood trauma and arrest-related inequities with patience and seamlessly related the statements back to the work to be completed, emphasizing how it would increase empathy for reentering citizens in our community.

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Mark and Courtney also modeled sincere regard for everyone in the Think Tank. At one meeting, they showed that regard with a spontaneous moment of quiet following one fellow's heart-wrenching description of feeling lost after a sexual assault. Because of their approach, the fellows shared thoughts, questions, ideas and their own aspirations, even as they produced art, and moved forward on their collaboration. In fact, as one of the fellows stressed in my interview with him, the entire process of creating art, completing the Resume for Freedom and distilling a person's rights into poetic statements, would not have been as productive without the trust built by Courtney and Mark.

The Client's Bill of Rights includes:

I deserve a lawyer who . . .

Understands that the outcome of my case will not only impact me, but those I love and need in my life, and those who love and need me

Tirelessly advocates on my behalf

Helps me understand the complete and lasting impacts of any choice, plea bargain or other decisions, that I am asked to make

Will represent me the way they would represent themselves or their family

### Defender Association Meeting

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the Think Tank Fellows met at the Defender Association of Philadelphia offices with Aviva Tevah of the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition. The representatives of the Defender Association in attendance were:

Keir Bradford-Gray — Chief Defender

Emma Reynolds — Assistant Defender and Temple Law Clinical Supervisor

Kurt Watkins — Chief of Social Work

Mark Houldin — Policy Director and Assistant Defender

Sheree Darden — Assistant Defender

Leola Hardee — Assistant Defender, Juvenile Unit

Lori Mach — Assistant Defender

Keir articulated the objectives of the Defender Association of Philadelphia, saying the first of their three goals was to humanize those in the criminal justice system by adding more resources on the front end. The office planned to accomplish this by finding out about the person's community supports at the start of the process. The second goal was for the Defender Association to be an involved participant in changing the perception of people charged or convicted in Philadelphia. The third goal was for the Defender Association to promote a participatory defense model of representation.

Keir mentioned that the office had moved to vertical representation for those charged with felonies, rather

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than horizontal representation wherein a new attorney represented the person facing charges at each court date. With the vertical representation instituted several years ago, a team of defense attorneys was assigned to each public defender client charged with a felony, and that team worked on the client's case throughout the process. Keir acknowledged that the office currently did not have the funding to hire the number of additional attorneys necessary to provide vertical representation in misdemeanor cases.

Kurt described the Defender's current efforts at linking people to treatment at the front end through social workers working directly at the Criminal Justice Center. These social workers provide 400–500 referrals per month to people who see them while appearing for their court dates. He also noted that social workers had recently begun conducting home visits as part of Defender services so clients did not have to travel for these appointments. Additionally, each social worker had access to the DONAFY smartphone application, which links users to information about available services across Philadelphia. He noted that there were 1,783 social services providers in the Philadelphia area, and worked hard to pull the information together to provide better services to clients.

As an example of the participatory defense model, one assistant defender highlighted her work with Temple University Beasley School of Law's clinical program. The program selected a small group of people charged solely with gun possession to receive services through the clinic. The clinic's law students, with her supervision, worked to get people released on bail immediately after their arrest and attempted to obtain a diversion from the criminal system or withdrawal of the gun possession charge by highlighting mitigating circumstances and bringing in witnesses who could testify to the good character of the person charged. The students worked closely with the person charged to show the decision makers each person's individual circumstances and community ties. While fiscal constraints did not allow the Defender offices to expand the participatory defense-based services, Emma was in the midst of asking to increase the number of students involved in the clinic so she could serve a larger number of people charged with gun possession.

The Think Tank discussed the Resume for Freedom and Client's Bill of Rights, noting both documents would help build trust and humanize those facing charges. Fellows noted that when these documents were presented they could encourage potential clients to use them and make potential clients more comfortable in the waiting area. Fellows could ensure people understood the need for the Resume for Freedom. One of the fellows mentioned that the Resume for Freedom highlighted mitigating information and help attorneys get to know clients better. Mark also mentioned that it also would provide personal information to each lawyer who represents the person at subsequent court dates because so many clients received horizontal representation.

The meeting ended with an agreement from the Defender to provide additional feedback on the Resume for Freedom and Client's Bill of Rights, and to determine how the Defender's initial interview process could be expanded to include Think Tank Fellows.

The fellows and several defenders then went to the interview area to assess the space. The fellows noted that the art and informational posters, as well as the arrest video being shown on a loop on the televisions, were not welcoming. For example, the video showed a police officer using a taser on someone while the narrator discussed civil rights. The violent act was a trigger for one of the fellows and could have been for others who had been arrested in Philadelphia. In addition, in one interview room a poster outlining the collateral

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consequences of a criminal conviction was posted behind the defense attorney's desk. This meant interviewees would see their defense attorney with those consequences as a backdrop. The group agreed that using the Think Tank's Preamble, poetry, and wall art, including behind the desks in interview rooms, would send a more welcoming and empathetic message. The fellows also suggested replacing the current video with a more empowering one. The group agreed this should be the subject of further discussion with the Defender in the future.

### Resume for Freedom Pilot Program

Following the meeting at the Defender offices, the Think Tank received Defender approval for distribution of the Client's Bill of Rights at the Defender Association and the use of fellows as volunteer advisors to encourage clients to complete the Resume for Freedom. They were provided with a desk and were able to meet with people at that desk or speak to them where they were seated in the waiting area. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, Think Tank Fellows began their pilot program by volunteering for two-hour shifts at the Defender Association.

At the beginning of the first shift, three of the fellows spoke to the people waiting to be interviewed as a group to make them comfortable and to explain the purpose of the Resume for Freedom. This included speaking to people individually as they waited for their attorney interviews. Most of the people they talked to took the time to complete the Resume for Freedom before their attorney interview, and one person even asked to see it again after his attorney interview in order to complete it more fully. The fellows spoke to fifty people in four hours on the first day. As the fellows noted, the level of stress diminished when they began to talk with people in the waiting area. As Mark Strandquist put it, having the fellows explain who they were and that the Resume for Freedom was a way to provide positive information "completely changed in the energy in the room."

At the May 15 Think Tank meeting, Mark Houldin reported that the completed Resumes for Freedom were included in each client's file and several lawyers had reached out to him to say they were glad to have them. Mark noted that asking for this kind of information was a culture shift for public defenders, but he was encouraged by the consistently positive feedback he received. An attorney told him that his client's answer to what would keep him out of trouble was pets, and the attorney relayed how everyone could relate to that and attorneys would not have asked about that without the Resume for Freedom.

As a returning citizen, one fellow has described the process of creating and piloting the Resume for Freedom and Client's Bill of Rights with the Defender Association as surprising. He was amazed that the seeds sown in early spring resulted in a document being used in May. As he said, "I couldn't believe we got to do that." From his perspective, a judge could not be fair to a person who was charged without information about his or her community ties, positive actions, and understanding of himself or herself. He stressed that every decision-maker needed much more than a criminal history to make a fair decision about a person.

Everyone agreed that the Resume for Freedom would not be completed and the Client's Bill of Rights would not be read by people waiting for interviews at the Defender offices without explanation and encouragement. If fellows could assist, as Aaron put it, they would put people at ease so they would be willing to provide that kind of personal information. The group also agreed they needed as many people as possible discussing the Client's Bill of Rights and completing the Resume for Freedom to promote a culture shift. They also needed as

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many lawyers as possible exposed to the documents in order for them to foster dialogue, create trust, and shift perceptions.

This pilot project continued through the end of May.

### Looking Forward

#### **Continuing the Reentry Think Tank**

Being part of the fellowship has been transformative for the Think Tank Fellows. As one fellow put it, he quickly realized how much he needed this cohort of reentering citizens as he moved through the process of re-establishing himself. He feels as a result of his participation, he is thinking less with anger about what he has been through and more with strategy about how to affect change; he added that he is “choosing his battles” now. He also had no idea that in the short span of the fellowship they would make such a variety of artwork and pilot a project that showed positive results with a large stakeholder like the Defender Association.

One fellow shared that he also had gained an appreciation of the potency of art as a means of communication from having been a Think Tank Fellow. Making it, sharing it, and seeing how it was received had made him more hopeful as a community member and more positive as a father. He saw firsthand how their art moved viewers and listeners, and felt they may have changed some attendees’ perspectives. In the expungement clinics and stakeholder summits, he felt the pop-up exhibits and their recitation of the Preamble allowed the fellows to show a personal side of themselves with large audiences. What he thought would just be a group activity with a stipend attached has given him real insight into the power of brainstorming, collaborating, and the power of art. He has no doubt future fellowships would be similarly transformative for reentering citizens.

At their last meeting on May 15, 2017, the group shared tears and expressions of gratitude for having been part of the Think Tank. A few will attend the upcoming events around the city. They also have an email group that will allow them to continue their conversations and share future projects. Each person hopes to stay active in the Philadelphia reentry community, and to contribute by sharing his or her expertise about how to meet the challenges faced by returning citizens—either as paid consultants or through their ongoing work with nonprofits and other service providers.

#### **Continuing the Defender Collaboration**

The Think Tank Fellows ended with several goals for their collaboration with the Defender. First, the Client’s Bill of Rights will be re-designed to include some of the Preamble; the group agreed this would make it “come alive” and make it more likely to be picked up. The document will be posted on the Defender’s website. The Think Tank will provide Mark Houldin with the rights that they deem most important so those they can be highlighted on the website. Mark also confirmed that the Defender would make copies of the Client’s Bill of Rights available to every client in their waiting area.

Second, the Think Tank’s artwork will replace some of the legal posters on the walls in the Defender waiting area. The artwork may be displayed in other areas of the defender offices as well.

Think Tank Fellows also hope to be able to continue their social advocacy for public defender clients, although it is not clear the Defender will be able to secure funding for this. While there was consensus that

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clients appreciated being able to complete the Resume for Freedom once it was explained to them and that attorneys appreciated having the additional information about their clients, the next steps were not certain. Some ideas discussed included the Fellows continuing their work as paid part-time consultants, possibly in conjunction with the organization's social workers. Mark Houldin mentioned proposing they use the fellows as pre-trial advocates for clients.

Serving as the Defender's representative for the collaboration meant a great deal to Mark Houldin both personally and professionally. He felt listening to the Think Tank's "fresh perspective" helped him see how Philadelphia's public defenders fail to send a welcoming the message to clients. As he put it:

I initially focused on what would the outcome be of having this information, for example, how would defenders use or not use this information. But now, I'm much more aware of the message this sends to our clients. That we are interested in our clients as people and we want to keep them out of jail. It's still too early to know how attorneys will or will not use the information, but we received positive feedback so far and [we are] hoping to find ways to sustain this project.

As a former defender, I know that an indigent defense attorney's perspective can be the first place prosecutors and courts turn when developing an understanding of the person charged. So, a public defender's deep understanding of the person she or he represents helps those in the court system not only understand the socio-economic issues the person faces, but also glimpse problems that are below the surface. The Resume for Freedom, the interaction with returning citizens at intake, and the ability to read and review the Client's Bill of Rights, all undoubtedly go a long way towards helping the person charged. But by making the client more comfortable and open to sharing positive parts of their lives, they also help a public defender fully understand and effectively tell the story of the person relying on their advocacy.

These initiatives also encourage participatory defense. If the Defender continues the Reentry Think Tank Pilot Program, it provides a setting where those facing charges will have an opportunity to interact with people in reentry, and answer questions that focus on the whole person. If the person being charged knows the attorney's advocacy is premised upon a deeper understanding, he or she is likely to be more engaged in participating in their defense. Ultimately, this can bring about better results not only at the pre-trial stage, but also at trial and sentencing.

Providing the Client's Bill of Rights would add a measure of transparency that could reduce the level of mistrust of public defenders as well. It would give the person facing the full force of the criminal justice system specific knowledge about what to expect from his or her attorney. Mark Houldin saw some of that mistrust when he began the collaboration with the Think Tank. He was not surprised because the Defender does not have a history of engaging in community-led initiatives that could change perceptions. In Mark's words:

The process of building trust was very helpful, as it's a roadmap for how we engage more community members in the future, and a reminder that we have to [. . .] hear the views of those directly affected and value their lived experience, without trying to diminish it. They had tremendous insight [. . .] on our work and [. . .] how to make our clients feel like we value them.

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After getting to know Mark and meeting other defenders, as well as engaging in the process of creating these documents, the fellows showed an increased understanding of the Defender Association and its role. As Mark put it, it took time and open conversations to build trust. This step towards community engagement will not only greatly change the perception of public defenders across the city, but also will allow the Defender Association to gain insights that improve its services.

Mark and Courtney's Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank Project has uniquely captured the perspectives and expertise of reentering Philadelphians through art, while simultaneously forging far-reaching connections with stakeholders. The work they have done has produced highly expressive artwork and deeply insightful collaborations that were driven and shaped by returning citizens. The product of their efforts is a growing understanding that having been ensnared by the criminal justice system shapes who they are but does not define them. By all accounts, if the work could continue in and around Philadelphia, it would help our citizens and our communities in innumerable ways.