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DARTMOUTH, Mass. — Bristol County inmate Lawrence Short is focused on life after incarceration, from staying out of trouble to finding and keeping a job.

And some big reasons for this laser-like focus on the future are the volunteers from the Attleboro District Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul who facilitated the “Getting Ahead While Getting Out” program at the House of Correction.

“You have inspired me and helped me think a lot about my inner self,” Short said at the program’s graduation ceremony recently. “This program has given me the motivation and confidence to break barriers and create change.”

For two hours each week for the past 20 weeks, St. Vincent de Paul volunteers have met with a group of inmates with the goal of making the transition back into society as easy as possible. Through the class, inmates compile a list of resources available to them, whether from friends and family to community providers and non-profit organizations.

Another component is the 72-hour plan, which breaks down how inmates will spend the first three days after getting out. Where will they go, who will they contact? How will they get from point A to point B? The plan includes backup options, so if housing falls through, what’s the next step?



The Attleboro District Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul recently celebrated the graduation ceremony of the Getting Ahead While Getting Out Program at the Bristol County House of Correction in Dartmouth. For the past 20 weeks, volunteers from the society have facilitated the program that helps inmates get ready for life after release. Attending the ceremony at the jail recently were SVdP volunteers Diana Reeves, Paul Hodge, Joan Blagdon, Tom Dwyer and Peter Kortright, graduates Frederick Stroud, Lawrence Short, William Strickland and Jeff Hanson, as well as Representative James Hawkins and Senator Paul Feeney. (Photo courtesy of the Bristol County Sheriff's Office)

“Every correctional facility should have this program,” Bristol County Sheriff Thomas M. Hodgson said. “There are many uncertainties inmates face upon release, and programs like this only make it easier for them to stay the course and follow the right path upon release.

“The volunteers from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are truly amazing people. We can’t thank them enough for their tireless work to make their community a better place by helping inmates reintegrate seamlessly into society.”

Program facilitator Diana Reeves read remarks from former class participants who had been released before the graduation, including one who was able to use his 72-hour plan and participation in the program to successfully be granted early parole.

“A lot of people think poverty is a lack of money, but poverty is really a lack of resources,” Reeves said. “We want to help with housing, clothing, food, and not only assist them in what resources are out there, but just be an ear to listen and provide encouragement.”

Five graduating inmates from the original group of 13 joined St. Vincent de Paul volunteers Paul Hodge, Joan Blagdon, Tom Dwyer, Peter Kortright and Reeves, along with Attleboro-area lawmakers and Sheriff’s Office staff at the recent graduation ceremony. Each inmate had a chance to speak about their experiences, and program leaders shared what impressed them most about the inmates.

“This was really touching to me,” Rep. James Hawkins said at the graduation. “I can see the gears in your heads turning when talking about the future. I’m really proud of each one of you.”

Sen. Paul Feeney, who called the St. Vincent de Paul volunteers “angels on earth,” used the New England Patriots to convey his message during the graduation ceremony, held a few days before the AFC Championship game in Kansas City.

“Imagine if the Patriots went without their playbooks,” he said. “Imagine if they just said ‘we’ll wing it.’ This program helped you make your playbook. Good luck on your next play.”

The Getting Ahead While Getting Out program is one prong of the St. Vincent de Paul re-entry program. At the graduation, Reeves said the society will soon be using space in a city building to expand its programs and offerings and offered much gratitude to Attleboro Mayor Paul Heroux for his support.