



Eleven years of second chances **By Latisha Catchatoorian**

latisha.catch@triangletribune.com

RALEIGH – What do you do when you’ve been in prison for five years, and you’re coming home to no job and no support system, with a permanent record that feels like a ball and chain? Contact Dennis Gaddy, of course.

Gaddy, the executive director of the nonprofit Community Success Initiative, is all about second chances. He founded CSI after spending five years in prison for some “unwise choices.” CSI recently celebrated its 11th year of helping former prisoners discover their potential, set worthy goals for their lives and take action in a positive way.

“(I feel) fortunate that we are still around helping people who need to get back on their feet,” Gaddy said. “It feels like a quick 11 years.” Gaddy said people hear you differently when they know you share their same story. This is one way his “15 Principles of Personal Growth and Leadership” have been able to make an impact on so many lives in the community. Many exciting things happened for CSI this year, such as partnerships with the N.C. Works Center in Raleigh and N.C. Access to Recovery. The Works Center partnership helps CSI clients attend classes and workshops in one place, whereas before they were referred to various locations. Access to Recovery is a voucher program that helps those with addictions and has partnered with CSI clients to develop action plans.

“What we were able to do with this Access to Recovery program, for example, with (the partnering of) Durham Tech and Dennis, we are very close to inking a deal so we will have individuals who are enrolled in this program be able to go to Durham Tech and, depending on how much time they want to invest, they can (get a career),” said Martin Woodard, ATR project director.

Dennis Gaddy and his CSI team have kept hope alive for formerly incarcerated people for 11 years running

Jobs play a big role in the success of an ex-convict staying on track. There is a 50 percent chance of recidivism in three years if a person doesn't have a support system and/or productive activities once they are released. "I have been fighting for people without jobs, without homes, without income, without aid." Said Sheldon Howard, the CSI jobs coordinator. Howard relayed a story about a man who they could not find a job for and said he felt like they had failed him. "The greatest thing we give to every person that comes through our program... may be hope. Hope doesn't pay the bills (though). We still need jobs," he said. With roughly 700,000 people coming home from prison each year, it can be a daunting feat to try and land a job with a criminal record.

And as Keith Daniels, who works with StepUp Ministry said, "Doors are hard to shove open in this world today, even if you have all the right things." "It can be depressing, but when I come into settings like this and I see decades of work and labor, and I see people who are willing to work a little longer... thank you for creating this occasion for celebration. Eleven years are truly something to rejoice in," Daniels said of CSI.

Glen Warren, founder of Fathers Forever, said CSI has done a phenomenal job on a systemic level of fighting for second chances, while simultaneously directing people to take responsibility for their actions. "I think what Dennis does is to help people realize that (things they do aren't mistakes, but bad choices. The difference is, when we start teaching people that, they start taking responsibility of doing that and they will stop," he said. "What Dennis does is not necessarily a handout but a handshake. A handshake is a partnership. CSI is really making a difference in the community."

Joseph Scott has been with CSI since its inception. "I've been there, done that, in reference to the prison culture. I was released in 2003. Had 15 years but didn't do 15 years by the grace of God," he said. "The transition from that (prison to civilian life) was not easy. The preconception of society on guys who were in prison... I had that challenge for years. Up until even lately." Scott was referred to CSI after struggling for a year to find a job and is now working, and said he has referred others. He said CSI can help people find their "XYZ plan" when their Plan Bs are exhausted.

"Dennis, through the dark hours, he was there for me beyond the obvious; he was there for me in the wee hours of the night when I needed someone to talk to. When I was perhaps not in the right frame of mind, I called him and he talked to me. He's my mentor to this day. We are friends beyond the superficial (reasons) of CSI," Scott said. Gaddy said one of the biggest misconceptions society has of those who have been incarcerated is that they are their worst mistake. "Sometimes people look at (that person) as always being that person. People change Who wants to be known by their worst mistake?," he said.

To learn more about CSI or donate, visit:

www.communitysuccess.org/donate. Or mail to: Community Success Initiative
PO Box 61114
Raleigh, NC 27661