

TRANSITION TIMES



VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1

1st QUARTER 2019

GREAT FALLS VETERAN'S REENTRY PROGRAM

By Brett Blasdell, Veteran's Reentry Program Specialist

What is the Veteran's Reentry Program? Many folks have heard about our new program, but some may not realize what it is about. Rather than spewing the details straight out of the program's directives and guidelines, I would like to describe its true essence. The heart and soul of the program and what makes it tick are the participants. Forward thinking and building off their common experiences as veterans fosters esprit de corps. Vet-to-Vet comradery and unified strength greatly enhances their chances at transitioning back to productive and fulfilling lives. Sharing their backgrounds, struggles and achievements with each other creates a brotherhood based deep in trust. It is truly remarkable to witness how quickly veterans of all branches and ages instantly band together with mutual support toward a mission of success. To fully understand how this program differs from any other, just watch them for a few minutes. You will notice their pride, not just in themselves but with pride in each other. You will see how they function as a team to reach their goals. There is no holding back with this group. They hold each other accountable, but they also act as rungs in a ladder encouraging each other to keep climbing upward rather than down. Every obstacle provides a challenge to be faced and conquered with a drive like no other. The discipline and determination learned in service resonates strongly. Our goofy cast of characters love and support each other like family. They will no doubt leave here better for having known each other. So again, it is not the specifics of the program, it is the people and the "can do, will do" approach that make it unique and special.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me, shall be my brother; be ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition."—William Shakespeare



The group enjoys working on puzzles together. This provides them the opportunity to relax and talk about their lives with each other. It serves as a bonding experience and allows them to share ideas and goals. Here are a few of the puzzles they have mastered with frames made by Zane Volbrecht.

Left to right: Zane "Cowboy" Volbrecht, Richard "Cappy" Thurman, Jessie "Schulzie" Schulz, Raymond "Levi" Sederdahl, John "JohnBar" Barsanti

GREAT FALLS VETERAN'S REENTRY PROGRAM - continued

By Brett Blasdell, Veteran's Reentry Program Specialist

Zane Volbrecht is quite the creative artist. He prefers hands on crafting using natural materials such as black smithing, tooling leather and churning out amazing horse hair projects. True to his roots he prefers to tackle his trades from start to finish. He dyes his own strands to the colors he desires then kicks into focus mode weaving the patterns. Zane has taken the time to teach the others the steps involved and sharing his passion with new found friends. From his background ranching, raising rodeo stock, rodeo contracting, craft skill and overall outlook on life, Zane epitomizes what Montanans are all about; hearts as open and big as the state itself.



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MY ROLE AT THE GREAT FALLS PRE-RELEASE

By Sandra Bearchum, Federal Social Service Coordinator

Many people wonder what role I play at the Center. I wear many hats. First, I am a key federal staff member and support team member for the federal case managers. I take care of the small but important issues facing transition into the community. This gives the Correctional Treatment Specialists the time to consolidate release plans and aid the residents through the transition process of the federal system. Second, I am an advocate for the federal residents when they first arrive. I help them obtain clothing and aid with their first phone call to family to set up further communication. For every question that is not answered by someone else, I am there, either with the information at hand or ready to find the answer. I facilitate groups and transport residents to medical appointments. I assist in finding housing and furnishings for those that release to this community. I also assist the resident in their offender registration if required. This is but a part of what I do for the federal residents. Now, let's talk about the hats I wear for everyone. When asked, I hand out property management housing packets, apartment applications, and help with child support issues. I facilitate the loaner coat program and organize the Medicaid signup events at the center. Between those events, I hold a weekly orientation group to ensure everyone gets a handout of Medicaid assistors and answer questions about the process the best I can. Even after that, I am still answering questions or troubleshooting a resident's medical access throughout the process until they are approved or denied. This can involve phone calls to Medicaid, emails to the DOC Medical Unit, or a local assistor. Troubleshooting can take up to a couple of weeks or more to get answers. I share housing lists and a packet I developed of resources in the community to aid in the resident's success. I do this for all campuses upon request. On top of that, I generate mandatory weekly and monthly reports.





JUANITA AND SANDY: A FRIENDSHIP By Sheena Jarvey, Volunteer Coordinator

It's Friday afternoon at 1:00 on the Women's Side, Meditation Room, and Juanita Rosales and Sandy Gurnsey are setting up shop. Juanita rummages around in her satchel and places materials on the table. Sandy lines up her art supplies – colored pencils, paper. She pulls out a fresh drawing sheet and waits, hand poised over the paper. Juanita opens her notebook and locates her pen. The magic is about to begin.

In a truly remarkable gift, Juanita and Sandy have been visiting the women at the Great Falls Pre-Release for many years. Juanita started her volunteer service here in 2000 and Sandy started shortly after, in 2003.

When I think of Juanita, I find her difficult to describe. It's as if all of the qualities a person would ideally have were rolled into one person. First off, Juanita is spiritual in the very best sense of the word. Her spirituality radiates calmness and acceptance, and her spiritual presence has a lightness and grace. Juanita's beautiful laughter is always a part of any conversation. Her memory is not just good for her age; her memory is excellent for anyone of any age! Juanita's historical knowledge is vast. But what is really, truly vast is Juanita's heart. Juanita is the matriarch of a wide ranging family which extends from Great Falls, to Canada, to all over the United States and to the Philippines. Juanita makes yearly trips to her native Philippines and greets her many friends. Juanita is an honored guest in churches that she has helped fund. Juanita also visits Filipino prisons (which, at best, could be described as overcrowded and miserable) and does what she can to bring hope and spiritual support to the incarcerated.



Juanita, Sheena, and Sandy

Juanita combines her spiritual gifts and her care for people in her weekly visits to the Pre-Release. She states that she has always been dedicated to the ministry and that it is simply a part of her life. Juanita states, "I get inspired when the women make steps in the right direction." And when things fall apart, Juanita understands this, as well. She is realistic. Juanita herself has experienced just about everything a person, and a mother, could go through, including living through the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, where she witnessed constant brutalities. She was the first Filipino nurse in Great Falls. For more information about her remarkable life, check out Juanita's book, "My Journey with the Good Shepard."

From a personal stand point, I know that my life has been enriched by my friendship with Juanita. To meet a person who has experienced so much, and given so much, is extraordinary. Age means nothing to Juanita. She is gracious, humble, wise, spiritual and loving. She gives to the Pre-Release without hesitation or qualifications, and wants the best for everyone she comes in contact with.

Sandy also has a wealth of life experiences and knowledge to share. Like Juanita, everything Sandy has been through has brought out the best in her. Sandy is serene and caring. She welcomes everyone who comes into her circle as a friend and wants good things and happiness for them. Sandy also has a quirky sense of humor and is the first one to chuckle at herself.

Sandy stays clear of pessimism, noting that, "too much negativity isn't good." This is part of the reason Juanita and Sandy have bonded with their friendship. In fact, Sandy states that Juanita makes her feel

special – like her sister or the best friend she has ever had. With their friendship, Sandy says she and Juanita can talk honestly about personal issues. Sandy says this friendship “makes me feel free.”

Sandy has been blessed with an uncanny art talent. Self-taught, Sandy can capture any person’s expression and look – and drawing a human face is very difficult. Sandy states, “I enjoy my art work. When I create a portrait it is with the aim that the person will feel good about themselves.” Throughout the years, I have watched the ladies react with surprise and happiness upon receiving their portraits. I keep a portrait that Sandy did of me on my bulletin board. It’s me, but at the same time, it’s more like me at my best. Through the lens of Sandy’s art work we are us, but we are transformed into our better selves: it’s like realizing more of our potential. This is Sandy’s gift.

Sandy says that she is always glad when the ladies expect to see her and they come in and visit. Sandy states, “That way I know what we do makes a difference.” The ladies describe their time with Juanita and Sandy as their time to be filled up with good things, be appreciated for who they are, and to get renewed. They further state that they just love Juanita and Sandy. Please stop by and get to know Juanita and Sandy, and hear their stories, and you will agree.

* * * * *

IN MEMORY OF ROSANNE MARES By Sheena Jarvey, Volunteer Coordinator

Rosanne Mares was our volunteer yoga instructor for two years prior to her death. When asked if she would volunteer to teach yoga at the Pre-Release, she simply said, “yes”.

Rosanne was upfront about her fight with cancer. During the first part of her volunteer service, the cancer was in remission and things looked good. Then, the cancer came back. Rosanne was still in the fight, but part of her knew it was now just a matter of time. However, her physical strength, from being a body builder, and flexibility, from yoga practice, was truly remarkable. In addition to volunteering at the Pre-Release, she held paid positions at Access Fitness and the University. Rosanne was also an avid volunteer for the animal rescue group, Pet Paw-see. Rosanne was a very spiritual person and she seemed to have tapped into a deep source of spiritual knowledge. It was evident that she was sustained by her faith and her spirit seemed to grow stronger each time I saw her.

Rosanne gave a hundred percent to her yoga students. She imparted her wisdom and skills as a gift freely given. Her focus radiated out when she began her classes and this focus carried her students along. In the last months of Rosanne’s service, Rosanne’s yoga student was Kristy Rydeen, who would meet with Rosanne every Tuesday afternoon. Kristy expressed her appreciation: “Rosanne had a major and positive impact on my life. She taught me so much about being mindful about my health and Rosanne always thanked me for taking care of myself.” Kristy noted that even when Rosanne became quit ill, Rosanne always stayed positive and giving and never betrayed any trace of negativity for her own situation. Kristy said that the Tuesday afternoon yoga sessions became a source of solace and renewal and a time where she was affirmed unequivocally.

Of all the ways we could describe Rosanne, I like Kristy’s lovely tribute the best, when she defined Rosanne as “quietly powerful”.
Thank you, Rosanne



Rosanne with her yoga students, 2017



HIRING EVENT

Andre Carrethers (pictured) and Alan Scanlon headed up a hiring event at the Great Falls Job Service. Current openings include Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Human Resource Manager, Cook, and Compliance Officers.

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STAFF NEWS

New Staff: We are pleased to announce the following new staff members: Compliance Officers **Ray McClelland** and **Ryan Konecny** and Correctional Treatment Specialist **Tim Schultz**.

In-House Staff Movement: Compliance Officer **Tom Dwyer** was chosen to be the Veteran’s Reentry Program Compliance Officer

Milestones:



5 Years, Compliance Officer – Lisa Bresnahan: I have lived in Montana most of my life and the rest of the time in Washington. I’ve worked as a CNA and a vet tech and enjoyed those occupations.

I believe in strong ethics which is very important for all jobs; this one especially. I’ve always wanted a job where I could make a difference, and I have been interested in corrections for some time. I enjoy interacting with the residents here at the Pre-Release.

As a side note, Lisa has three Arabian horses and two Doberman Pinschers that occupy her off duty hours. She also has two daughters and five grandchildren.

10 Years, Compliance Officer - Patricia Myers grew up in West Milford, New Jersey, the youngest girl of three brothers and seven sisters. When asked what it was like growing up with so many siblings, Pat responded, “I felt like I had a lot of bosses telling me what to do and when to do it, but it was a lot of fun.” She added that although they didn’t always get along, they supported one another.

Pat ventured out west to visit her sister in Boulder, Montana, met a guy, and the rest, as they say, is history. While raising her two sons in Boulder, Pat worked at First Boulder Valley Bank for 7 years, Alternative Youth Adventures (now Youth Dynamics) for 5 years, and Elkhorn Treatment Center for 5 years.

Pat has 2 young granddaughters that live in Idaho. In her spare time she enjoys bike riding, gardening, cooking, and traveling. Pat likes working at Great Falls Pre-Release because, “Every day is something different. I really like it when I see a resident doing well.”



Milestones - continued



15 Years, Compliance Officer – Rosina Buda grew up in Brooklyn, New York. What brought her to Montana? Prior to being a New York City Police Officer, her dad was stationed in Great Falls and liked the area, so he moved his family here when he retired. Although she has been in Montana for 27 years, Rosie’s Brooklyn accent is prominent along with her vivacious Italian personality.

Rosie landed a federal job with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and traveled all over Montana and North Dakota testing people for jobs and high school students for military entrance. During this period of time she also owned Pizza Plus in Sun Prairie. All of the traveling wore on Rosie, so she acquired a job with Homeland Security working at the Hector International Airport in Fargo, North Dakota.

Fortunately, Rosie found her way back to Sun Prairie. Her hobbies include cooking, flower gardening, and growing trees. Growing trees? “Sun Prairie is barren and the trees are always dying.”

Rosie admitted that she has planted a lot of trees and a lot of them didn’t make it.

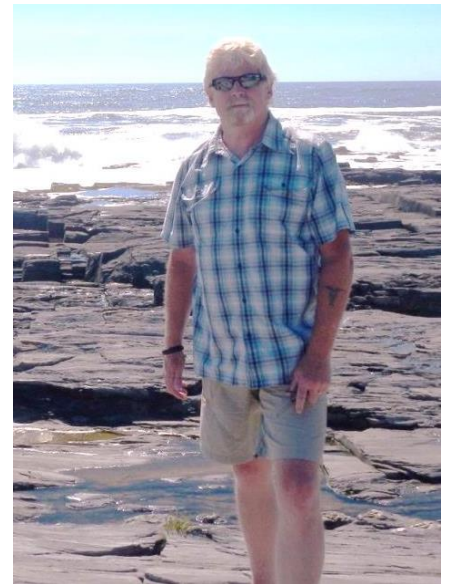
Why does Rosie like working here? She enjoys visiting and working with the many personalities of both the residents and the staff. “I like to think people can learn new things from me, and I can learn new things from them.”

25 Years, Program Manager – Mike Scott

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.

Many of you probably recognized that as the opening paragraph of Herman Melville’s “Moby Dick.” The ill-fated Ishmael and I share similar beginnings and motivation, but as I can still laugh with the telling of my tales, I am clearly the more fortunate one.

I grew up in a small coastal Maine town. As the second of three boys I filled the role of middle child, but without the prerequisite feelings of emptiness, inadequacy or jealousy. I also failed to exhibit any sign of introversion, though I loved to read, and in my family that pegged me as being a little odd. My older brother caught most of the trouble and our younger brother could do no wrong in our parent’s eyes. We were the typical 1960’s family; dad worked full-time, mom stayed home and actively parented. Life was school, church, chores and homework. Rules were meant to be followed. Dinner was always at the dinner table and if you wanted to eat, you’d better be settled in your appointed chair before dad washed-up and sat down. No one left the table until all the food on their plate was eaten, and if you asked to be excused before the meal was done, you’d better have a valid reason - or proof that the house was in fact on fire.



Milestones – continued

25 Years, Program Manager – Mike Scott

My future was decided at a very young age. I come from a very long line of sailors and like those before me, I developed a deep love and respect for the sea. Shortly after graduating high school I joined the Navy, shipped off to boot camp and began a career that spanned over 20 years, hundreds of adventures and thousands of miles across the globe. I saw amazing things and met some truly remarkable people. If given the chance to do it all again, my answer would be, “Absolutely, every minute of every day!”

Along the way I fell in love and married a third generation Montana girl and after countless years on the move we agreed to settle our growing family closer to her home. Upon retiring from the Navy, we moved to Great Falls and I started working at the Pre-Release. It was my intention to land a nice cushy desk job that would never take me away from family for extended time-frames. The job economy was not favorable at the time, at least for those high paying cushy jobs I had envisioned. Instead, I accepted a part-time position as a Resident Advisor and even though it wasn’t a very cushy job, I was pleased to have gotten my foot in the door.

I wouldn’t say that the Great Falls Pre-Release was in its infancy, but we did have just one building and less than fifty male residents. I paid attention to the job, learned everything that I could, and perhaps most importantly, listened to the seasoned employees and even a few seasoned residents. I worked every extra shift I could get and recall working many back-to-back shifts. We did not have a video monitoring or TOM system and the few computers that were around were used as word-processors by management and counseling staff.

A full-year later, there was finally a full-time vacancy and I was chosen to fill the position as Counselor for the Boot Camp AfterCare Program. Twelve years later we started construction on the East Campus, and I was asked to provide oversight for programs (Quality Control) and to fill a management presence at the new campus. As with the Navy, I have no regrets and many happy memories working with some of the most professional, talented people that I’ve ever met. Again, if given the chance to do it all again, my answer would be the same, “Absolutely, every minute of every day!”

The future? I have an idea of the optimal time to begin my next adventure (Retirement) and will share that when the time is right. There’s still so much to be done before that!

I still visit Maine every few years. As much as I love Montana, I have sea water in my veins and one day my earthly remains will be committed to the briny deep of the North Atlantic. Until then, I’ll enjoy the beauty of Montana’s waterways and reminisce about my seafaring days gone by.

“I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I’ll go to it laughing.”

— Herman Melville



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TRANSITION TIMES

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MISSION STATEMENT

Great Falls Pre-Release Services, Inc. provides a cost-effective alternative to incarceration for offenders through a variety of community-based correctional treatment programs. Great Falls Pre-Release Services, Inc. is dedicated to public safety and trust through professional, quality services which facilitate personal growth through positive change and individual responsibility of assigned offenders.



gfprc.org

Vision Statement

Dedicated to providing resources and opportunities that safely and successfully restore offenders into society.

Statement of Values

- *Motivation:* A desire to help others reach their full potential.
- *Professionalism:* Maintain proper interactions with staff, residents, and the community.
- *Accountability:* Take ownership for successes and shortcomings, to ourselves and others
- *Equality:* Ensure equality by expressing, in attitudes and actions, respect for all.
- *Dignity:* Model behavior in a respectful manner to instill a sense of self-respect and to bolster a positive self-image.
- *Community:* Develop a positive environment that facilitates healthy change as the residents integrate into the broader community.