

Breaking the cycle for ex-cons

Melissa Sorger, The Examiner

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Graduate Adrian Muldrow with his wife and daughters after the Maryland Re-entry Partnership graduation ceremony in Baltimore on Wednesday.

— Kristine Buls/Examiner

BALTIMORE - Helping former inmates does more than rebuild lives destroyed by crime, say administrators of Catholic Charities' Maryland Re-entry Partnership — it saves taxpayers the cost of prosecuting them for falling back into bad habits.

“They are not just ex-cons coming out of prison; they can change their lives if they are given a chance,” said Jackie Muldrow, wife of Adrian Muldrow, one of 41 REP graduates of 2008 and former convict.

Muldrow landed in prison multiple times since he was 16, culminating in an arrest for murder in 1999. He admitted to selling drugs in the past but said when he was wrongly accused, tried and convicted for first-degree murder, then sentenced to life plus 20 years, he felt the roof cave in.

“I kept seeing courses of my life flashed before me. I almost felt dead. A part of me felt defeated, and a part of me felt like it wasn't over, like God had something better for me,” Muldrow said.

The conviction was overturned and Muldrow was released in 2006.

Wednesday evening he graduated, along with a few dozen other former offenders, from the re-entry program. During the last two years, he held a steady job with a baking company, recently purchased a new home in Joppa, and has a wife, stepdaughter and a 1-year-old baby girl.

“It's just so sad that I wasted so many years of my life in an institution, but I believe that I had to go through what I went through to be the person I am today,” he said. Now, “it's like I never missed a beat.”

Muldrow's family was at the graduation ceremony on Wednesday night supporting him.

“I feel great about him changing into a person I know he can be,” said Sydney Banks, 10, Muldrow's stepdaughter.

The program helps former convicts with housing, job placement, health issues, substance abuse, goals with employment and education, getting Social Security cards and birth certificates.

“All the money that's being spent to house a guy behind bars — it's much cheaper to do it out here,” said case manager David Williams. “We constantly struggle with addiction, some of those men do re-offend.”

REP served 199 men in 2007, and 67 percent keep in touch after they graduate, REP Director Trevor Britt said. Although more than half of inmates released from Maryland prisons end up back behind bars, this program has a recidivism rate of 10 percent.

The case manager meets the inmate at the prison gate, Britt said. “Whether they need a ride or not. We just want to show, ‘Hey, we are here for you.’”

Most case managers are ex-offenders themselves, he said. “Case managers are aware of feelings, behaviors, emotions that are intrinsic to someone being released from prison.”

The graduates are truly grateful.

“I was dead,” said Ray Sharp, 52. “This program gave me the opportunity to live.”

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