



Coming Home Pilot Program

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, NY

Spring 2016

Restorative Community Project



On October 6, 2015, The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, NY launched its pilot Coming Home Program. This program, that serves men and women who were previously incarcerated, introduced healing through a community environment.

The pilot program cycle was 19 consecutive weeks plus 4 follow-up sessions. Throughout our time together, and thanks to Judith Knauss' enormous spirit and creativity, our dinners were infused with the holiday cheer of Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years! The program held its graduation on February 9th, 2016.



Lyasia Baker

We celebrate the Graduates of our first Coming Home Program:

Lyasia Baker

Holly Bell

Ricardo Colon

Holly Storms



Coming Home Pilot Program!

Achievements:

Total # of Sessions	23
# of Poughkeepsie community congregations that provided meals	14
# Served at dinner each week	20
# of UU members who participated in preparing meals	35
Number of graduates	4

Poughkeepsie Restorative Community Project expands!

In 2015 The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship launched its pilot Coming Home Program for the post-incarcerated community! The 2014 success of First Congregational United Church of Christ's Living Well pilot Program inspired community members within Poughkeepsie and building on their cooperative experience with FCC, the UU prepared for their Coming Home program. These two sibling programs have now graduated a combined 14 participants, served 55 meals and had amazing community healing experience.

The Coming Home Program Model

Coming Home seeks to empower returning citizens, and is an evidence-informed/well-established model with a track record of success with over a thousand graduates in the New York Metropolitan area in the past two decades. Participants work with facilitators and mentors to support personal healing and growth, skill development, and reintegration into the community.

Each weekly session begins with breaking bread together, followed by a session on life skills, the sharing of personal stories in the context of a supportive group process, working on setting goals and one-to-one mentoring. Over the course of the program a family-like community is formed through the creation of an environment based on safety, trust, support and respect.

Enormous healing occurs with the meal. This is a time that participants learn to sit together and authentically interact, often for the first time. Staff interact and sit with different people each week. Everyone rotates their seating as they become more comfortable. We discover each other over the shared experience of dining together.

A True Community Collaboration

Mentors

Eight mentors attended the mentor training and lovingly supported our participants through 23 weeks of the program. Many mentors reported having been changed themselves through participating in the program—the boundaries of “us” and “them” dissolved and we became simply “we.” A special thanks to our mentors:

- Jeff Asher**
- Reed Asher**
- Cori Cumming**
- Theresa Giovanniello**
- Steve Giovanniello**
- Walter LeFlore**
- Robert Martin**
- Vincent Pollina**

Our Intern

Each program is assigned a graduate student specializing in social work. Our students assist with case management and connecting our participants to resources.

Our intern, Barbara Muratore writes:

“My experience with the Home Coming group is something that will stay with me forever. The support from the mentors, facilitators, and volunteers was incredible, and the strength and resiliency from the participants was unforgettable. Everyone from this group gave something, and in turn everyone was able to take something away. I am honored that I was able to be a part of this group and I look forward to seeing this group take place in the future.”

Meals

We were delighted to have Nick Garin step in as the Coming Home meal coordinator. Through his outreach and collaborative spirit our dinner was prepared and our table was blessed by 14 different congregations! All 14 congregations were invited to “break bread” with us the evening they prepared the meal and were invited to graduation thus furthering the ties between Coming Home and the larger Poughkeepsie faith community. Special thanks to all those who contributed to the meals:

- Beulah Baptist,**
- Temple Beth EL,**
- Vassar Temple,**
- Shir Chadash,**
- Schomre Israel,**
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church,**
- St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church,**
- Freedom Plains Presbyterian Church,**
- Hindu Samaj Temple,**
- St. Kateri Tekakwitha Roman Catholic Church,**
- Poughkeepsie Friends Meeting,**
- Redeemed Christian Fellowship,**
- C.O.G.O.P., Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie**



I was sort of dragged into this program feeling like I had nothing to contribute. "How could an older white woman living a protected middle-class life possibly be helpful to anyone from the incarcerated population." Well, I soon found out that I did, and I also found out that they were not the scary individuals that I presumed them to be. I think I learned more from everyone else in the program than I was able to impart, and I am very grateful for the experience, and would gladly do it again. I really hope we can find the resources to do this. ~Reed Asher



Lyasia Baker, Ricardo Colon, Holly Bell

11 Annual Peace Concert An Afternoon of Stories

On Sunday, Feb. 7, 2016 the Story Circle of the Dutchess County Interfaith Council captivated an enthusiastic audience with stories and raised \$800 for the Coming Home program. These local storytellers believe that sharing stories from our many spiritual traditions, our varied heritage and our own lives will allow us to value our diverse truths and see each other as unique individuals. Two of our participants received applause and a single rose from the Story Circle for their courage and commitment to participating in Coming Home.

Lorraine Hartin-Gelardi told the audience that “stories have the power to bring people together.” In addition to raising significant funds for Coming



Home it was a wonderful experience of storytelling for our participants whom were working on their own stories.

Coming Home Coffee House

As part of the awareness-raising of the program, the Fellowship sponsored the "Coming Home Coffee House" fundraiser, which was held on November 14, 2015. With poetry and music provided by performers from the Fellowship and the wider community, and wonderful desserts, the coffee house raised more than \$600 from just "passing the hat." Some 50 fifty people enjoyed the festivities, which also generated a lot of interest in the program and additional volunteers to provide meals for the program.



Laura Storms

I saw the potential in this program from the very start. It has surpassed my hopes and expectations across a number of dimensions. Participants, mentors and facilitators quickly established a deeper bond than I could have imagined. We provided a safe harbor for the participants. Mentors got comfortably close to a population we might otherwise have never knowingly encountered. Our congregation built relationships with other local congregations who were happy to support our work and feed us. I believe, literally, everyone involved benefited by our involvement in the Coming Home Program.

~Reverend Walter LeFlore

Graduation



Holly Bell & Mayor Rob Rolison

The four graduates committed themselves to a 23 week program with an attendance rate of 95%! Mentor Vincent Pollina hand crafted frames for their graduation certificates. Mayor Rob Rolison and Senator Sue Serino presented certificates to honor our graduates.

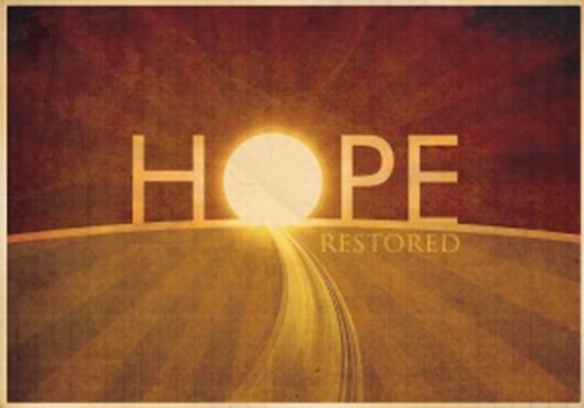
Our data outcomes for this Coming Home program revealed an exceptional increase in participants feeling ‘socially supported.’ Given that recidivism is highly correlated to feelings of isolation and alienation, this is a significant mark of healing.

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, NY

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The Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty Fordham University Graduate School of Social Services

On behalf of the Beck Institute, Lisa Velazquez, Coordinator and Sarah Franek, Co-Facilitator would like to thank The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie for taking a leap of faith and hosting a pilot Coming Home!

Coming Home works to restore social justice by fostering communal accountability and care of all persons. Coming Home encourages congregational involvement by providing opportunities for education and awareness, community welcoming and celebration, and volunteer opportunities such as mentoring, meal preparation and community outreach. The Beck Institute provides congregations with the necessary support services for a successful Coming Home program including: mentor training, program facilitator development, program management support, social work interns, program resources, education, program evaluation, and participant outreach, selection and development.

The Beck Institute's mission supports the faith communities tradition to embrace and respect the poor, marginalized and oppressed members of society. The Coming Home Program evolved from a healing model, developed over 25 years ago by the New York Archdiocese of Catholic Charities and the Interfaith Assembly for Homelessness and Housing. Coming Home provides a faith-in-action community experience tailored to meet the needs of isolated persons experiencing challenging life transitions.

Coming Home Core Components

