



About Us

- **Thresholds in Delaware County** is an organization of volunteers who teach decision-making skills in the State Correctional Institution, Chester; the George W. Hill Correctional Facility, Thornton; and the Juvenile Detention Center, Lima, PA
- P O. Box 114, Thornton, PA 19373
- 610-459-9384
- www.thresholdsdelco.org

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We hope that the Thresholds in Delaware County Email Newsletter will be a useful source of information and that it will provide opportunity for discussion about the Thresholds program. Please help to energize this newsletter by sending feedback, comments, or letters to the editors in response to articles. We will publish them in future issues. Also, we welcome ideas for articles and news you would like to read about. Please send suggestions for making this newsletter useful and informative to you.

Email contacts:

gloriabeaming@gmail.com
Jascheffler1@gmail.com
joannematteucci@gmail.com

Thresholds in Delaware County Newsletter Fall 2016

Thresholds in Delaware County - Eastern State Penitentiary Outing

Thresholds in Delaware County outing on October 16 included a one-hour guided adult tour of Eastern State Penitentiary, in the Fairmount section of Philadelphia. This social and educational outing "highlighted Eastern States' 142-year history, revolutionary architecture, notorious inmates and world-wide influence."

Prison Visiting at Eastern State Penitentiary: A Long Tradition in Philadelphia

As teachers of the Thresholds program, members of Thresholds in Delaware County continue a long tradition of prison visiting by community volunteers in the Philadelphia area. When Eastern State Penitentiary opened in 1829, its innovative Pennsylvania System of separate confinement with labor became internationally celebrated. Because this system required prisoners to be housed in individual cells, where they were strictly prohibited from contacting each other, a system of inspections and visits by people from the community was necessary in order to ensure humane treatment of prisoners. The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (which became today's Pennsylvania Prison Society), was mandated by Pennsylvania law to visit Eastern State Penitentiary regularly in order to fulfill this important function. The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, a sort of women's auxiliary of this all-male Philadelphia Society, visited women incarcerated at Eastern State. Members of these societies were generally Quakers and other religiously-minded citizens of Philadelphia. They were people of some means, whose keen sense of civic and moral responsibility compelled them to use their wealth and leisure to address social problems they saw in the growing urban environment.

Visits to Eastern State Penitentiary were generally conducted weekly, and the Philadelphia Society and the women's association recorded the number of visits in regular reports. Because maintaining the principle of prisoner anonymity and separation was a priority, visitors went directly into the cells, where they talked with men and women, read the Bible, and taught those who were illiterate to read.

In reports throughout the nineteenth century, the Philadelphia Society noted that discharged prisoners faced practical employment and housing difficulties, which they addressed by providing financial assistance and some job referrals. They believed separation of those who had been incarcerated from each other must continue to be maintained on the outside. Only the female association, recognizing that discharged women faced particularly difficult obstacles in reentering society, took the major step to open a sort of halfway house, the Howard Home. Here, discharged women lived together, received training in domestic tasks, and were finally placed with families, usually in the country.

Almost two hundred years ago, visitors reached out a helping hand to incarcerated men and women, even in a prison as formidable as Eastern State Penitentiary. Thresholds in Delaware County continues this area's long tradition of offering to its clients assistance and support for positive change.

TEACHER FEATURE

Interview with Fran Battista, Asst. Program Coordinator, George Hill Facility

By Judith Scheffler

One of the first people I met when I attended my Thresholds in Delaware County training session was Fran Battista, Asst. Program Coordinator at the George Hill Facility. Fran's encouraging words and positive energy made me even more eager to begin working with the Thresholds program, and to work with women clients in particular. I was happy to have the opportunity to interview Fran and learn more about her involvement with Thresholds, and I'm sure that Thresholds members will be interested to read about her experiences.

How long have you been with Thresholds in Delaware County? How did you get interested in the program?

For as long as I can remember I have been a helper: from a rabbit with a broken leg to graduating from college with a Social Work degree, to the present and beyond. In August of 2014 I saw an ad asking for volunteers to attend a training to teach in prisons. I became interested when I found out that at George Hill Facility, the men had an ongoing, working Thresholds program and the women did not. I decided I would take on the challenge and see if I could change that. I found out that this would be easier said than done. I found out first hand that introducing a new idea and making it work to an establishment that does not accept new ideas easily was difficult. For some reason there was outside resistance to starting a program for women. Many times I would hear "no way; the women are all crazy and it won't work." This assumption and attitude just made me all the more determined! Elek Fenyes and I worked together for months trying to make a change.

What sort of work do you do with Thresholds?

Elek, who was the program director, was able to work behind the scenes with the officials who could help make the change and I started promoting the program to the women and some of the correctional officers on unit 9, where the women are housed. There have been more ups and downs than a roller coaster!! I became assistant program coordinator and I felt that there was a light at the end of a very dark tunnel. I have learned that with the prison system nothing is for sure and having to work with constant unknowns is what it is. It is my job to make it work the best I can with a positive, friendly attitude no matter what the day presents.

What do you find rewarding about your work with Thresholds?

In the beginning a challenge was working with the women around trust issues with "outsiders," and that is what I was. Drawing on my past experiences I know that you "get what you give," so that is exactly what I did. I gave each woman that I talked to, respect, understanding, and a smile. I let them know that what they might have done, or why they were there was not an issue. I was inviting them to sign up with the Thresholds program. This opened the door to trust. I am known as Miss Fran, the Thresholds lady!!! I have permission to go directly onto each of the units on the block and sit with the women, hopefully encouraging them to join Thresholds and hear about a different way of thinking. We have grown by leaps and bounds. The graduating women now talk to others. I now have requests to sign up and women are looking for me on Fridays to fill out an intake to join the program.

What do you find to be the most challenging part of working with Thresholds?

One of the rules is that men are not allowed to teach the women, but women can teach men, so our teaching pool is limited. We would not be able to see any success at all if it weren't for the dedication of our volunteers. Many times women do not show up or are transferred out without any notice to anyone. It is just the way it is and not something we will ever be able to change. Just one of those challenges.

Have you encountered any clients who had notable stories or insights as they learned the Thresholds decision-making program?

I look at my time so far at Thresholds as a blessing. One of these women could have been my mother, or sister, or daughter or friend. They are not, but they belong to someone somewhere. I believe the saying that "you cannot judge a book by its cover." I will always have my own opinion, but it is not to judge but to think what it would be like to walk in their shoes.

Do you have any ideas or suggestions for the Thresholds in Delaware County Program?

My hope for Thresholds is to have a long and happy life. I hope that, as a program, it will be open to new and fresh ideas to help the program grow and stay successful. Sometimes I find that the teaching materials can be difficult. My new challenge is to try to see the material from our clients' point of view. I think about contacting one or more clients that have successfully completed the Thresholds program and listen to their experience with the program, and ideas they might have to make the material more user-friendly.

"LIFE HAS NO ELEVATOR. YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE STAIRS."
UNKNOWN

"A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations."
Patricia Neal

"Leadership is not wielding authority; it's empowering people."
Becky Brodin

CLIENT FEATURE

INTERVIEW WITH A FORMER CLIENT, GARY M. 9-11-16

By Gloria Beam

Gary was in his 20's & had been drinking since about 12 or 13 years of age. That was about 30 years ago & he was an inmate at George Hill Facility for Aggravated Assault when he heard about the Thresholds Program.

At that time the Quad system was not in use & He wanted more time out of his cell so he signed up for Thresholds. He states that he didn't believe in the advice when he first started but by the 3rd week of involvement he started to use the information from the 1:1 sessions. He especially started using the Brainstorming idea. Gary explains this saying, "you know, how my actions effect others."

He explains he was changing from a Reactive person to a Decision making person. I asked him to give me an example of how he used this Brainstorming in his life. His example was relating to a "friend" who had "ripped me off for 500" & how Gary made the choice "not to pursue him when I thought I could have beat him up with a baseball bat. I said to myself, He's not worth it. He's a know-it-all & a user. So I wrote him off."

Gary also told about frequently meeting people who are difficult to deal with & uses another example of when he had his own roofing business & the male customer was "going off to Gary & Gary just stepped back & let the guy go on & on" & then Gary asked the guy, "feel better?" They both looked at each other & laughed & had no further outbursts or problems with this man.

So without a rigid plan, "Brainstorming or thinking first" has now become an "automatic response & part of his daily life." Gary also made a connection between Thresholds & the AA/NA programs—where you need to "shut up & listen—put away your own ego because when one is in an addictive living state you are in survival mode—nothing else matters except getting the next drink or drug."



TEACHER TIPS

By Gloria Beam

Corner Office by Adam Bryant in the NY Times Business Section of Aug. 28, 2016

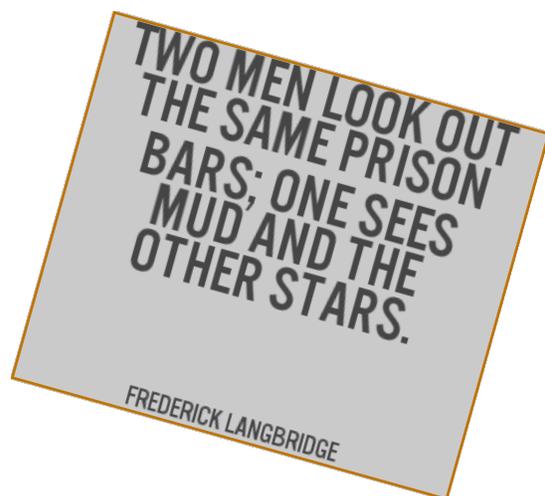
Interview of Lloyd Carney- CEO of Brocade, a data & storage networking firm

Mr. Carey is a Black entrepreneur who was born in Jamaica, West Indies."

Adam Bryant start with information re Mr. Carey's viewpoints & skills. When the interviewer asks Carey "How Do You Hire? prospective employees" the answers were especially startling.

Mr. Carey replied, "I always ask about the thing you're most proud of and the thing you're least proud of..." I also want to know "what you failed at, or you had a really tough time with. What did you learn from it? How did you grow from that experience?"

Looking at these questions I realized how they may be useful in the Micro sessions with our clients. So I asked my present client those very questions when our session was winding down & he had time to pause & think of these things from his life. His answers were helpful to me in getting closer to his basic character & the priority system he is basing his decisions upon. I can encourage the proud decisions & we can talk together about the items he is least proud of & how he has grown.





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P.O. Box 114
Thornton, PA 19373
www.thresholdsdelco.org

**Thank you to those of you have already sent your annual gift
following receipt of our appeal letter in September!**

**We truly could not provide the Thresholds program to so many inmates in
Delaware County without your loyal and generous support!**

For those of you have not donated yet—it is never too late!

Gifts of any amount are very much appreciated!



We hope you enjoyed reading the Newsletter! We welcome your thoughts, feedback and ideas for future issues! Please email either Gloria Beam, Judy Scheffler, or Joanne Matteucci at the email addresses provided on the cover of this issue.

Break the Cycle