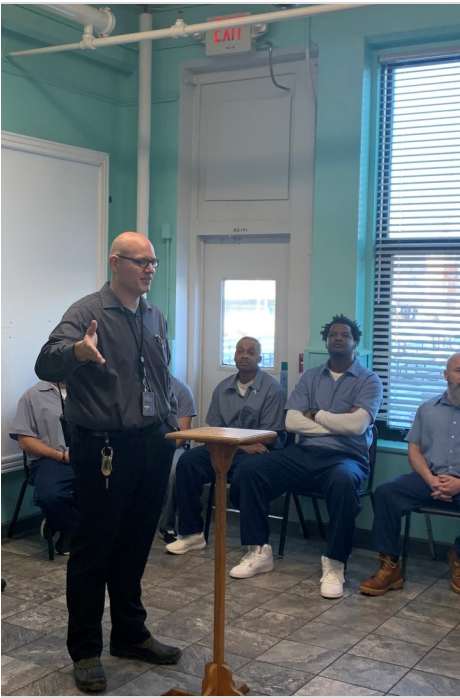




I deem it a great privilege to join the Reentry Program for the few months I have worked with them. Moreover, Shawn Stover has been a great leader and has taught me what reentry is all about and made sure I was conversant with some of the terms used. I had so much fun meeting people and introducing myself repeatedly because I was African. I am surely going to miss the Reentry Program. I plan to utilize what I have learned to also impact others especially the less privileged.



Clark Goble CCI opening ceremonies



Dan Enger at CCI with Toastmasters participants Feb 28th, 2020

In early October 2019, Dan Enger of Toastmasters reached out to me, expressing interest in offering a one-month public speaking course at a prison in or near Southeastern Ohio. Dan, who splits his time between Georgia and Appalachian Ohio, is a Distinguished Toastmaster who began teaching public speaking over thirty years ago and has been offering Toastmasters programs in prisons in Georgia since 2017. He says that he considers his work in prisons to be some of the most fulfilling and personally enriching work he has ever done. I was able to link Dan with Jay Forshey of ODRC, and at the end of November Dan, Jay and I attended a meeting with key staff from Chillicothe Correctional Institution (CCI) and Ross Correctional Institution (RCI). We were pleased to hear that both CCI and RCI were positive and open to the public speaking training for the inmates. Toastmasters is provided in many Ohio prisons but had not been offered at CCI or RCI previously. Just after Christmas, Dan and I attended a one-day, special ODRC volunteer training that Rachel Huff from RCI was kind enough to give us at the Athens OMJ Center.

CCI and RCI staff did an exceptional job in making all necessary arrangements for the intensive, eight-session Toastmasters *Speechcraft* course, which was conducted throughout the month of February. Classes met for two hours twice a week, and the students diligently dedicated many additional hours studying and preparing outside of class. The course culminated in graduation events at the two facilities on Friday, February 28, 2020. Highlights of the ceremonies were inspirational speeches presented by each of the graduates, as well as the opportunity for graduates and their family members, prison staff and outside guests to enjoy a meal together. Speaking and sharing personal stories helps a person to process and work through adversities. Previous mistakes do not have to define a person, and hope gives people a chance to write a new story for their lives. The friends and family members can see them in a different, more positive light.

I have great admiration for the speakers, most of whom were notably nervous and apprehensive about talking in public. All of them were changed afterwards and walked a little taller knowing that they could accomplish great things in their lives by stepping outside of their comfort zone. The comradery and respect formed with the Toastmasters participants and their appreciation to Dan Enger for treating them like human beings was tremendous. Freedom can be taken from a person, but as the core is charged with kindness and wisdom a person gains internal strength. I was honored to be a part of the audience with the other prison staff, guests and family/friends of the speakers. I found myself taken outside of the prison walls to another place of past regrets, healing and retrospection by the speakers' personal messages and passionate storytelling. Special thanks to Clark Goble, Holly Uhrig, Rachel Huff, Alan Szoke, Brad Williams and all the other prison staff working behind the scenes to make this experience possible. Ask yourself: What can you or your community promote to encourage personal growth in individuals who have so much potential but so little opportunity?

#### NEXT MEETING INFORMATION

The next task force meeting will be on **May 18th, 2020 at 10:00AM** at the Athens County Job and Family Services County Home Office (13183 St Rt. 13 Millfield, Ohio 45761) in the conference room. Pending Covid 19 quarantine.

This newsletter was initially established January 2017 by Erin Phillips previous AmeriCorps Vista through Appalachian Center For Economic Networks (ACEnet) and is currently edited and maintained by Athens Reentry Taskforce Chairperson Shawn Stover released on April 16th, 2020.