

## MAKING THE DREAM WORK

*PowerNet of Dayton's Re-Entry Program Provides Opportunity and Hope for Ex-Offenders*

BY CHRISTOPHER C. KELLY, CCHD VOLUNTEER

In 2002, when a number of neighborhood residents in Dayton, Ohio, grew increasingly concerned about the continued impact of street criminals on their community, they organized themselves as PowerNet of Dayton and began to act. The result is a novel community development solution that today serves as a model re-entry program for ex-offenders, offering support, opportunity, and hope.

PowerNet's **GEM** (Groups, Education, and Mentoring) Leadership Development Program, conducted at the Dayton Correctional Institution (DCI), has already helped more than two dozen ex-offenders overcome obstacles to a positive return to society. The program is so successful that local, state, and federal officials are encouraging its implementation in other Ohio correctional facilities. Because of PowerNet, fewer criminals are returning to the streets of Dayton.

"PowerNet is really about what a network of individuals can do," says Craig Powell, the group's founder and executive director. "Our motto is 'It takes teamwork to make a dream work.'"

Making that dream work is important to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), which provided a combined \$35,000 in organizing grants to PowerNet in 2005 and 2006.

"[PowerNet is] a wonderful organization," says Cori Thibodeau, regional director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Catholic Social Action Office. "[It] does a great job for re-entry."

Powell points out the key role of CCHD in making PowerNet happen: "It was the CCHD funding that helped us get up and running to accomplish this work."



Photos courtesy of PowerNet of Dayton

POWERNET STAFF MEMBERS CONDUCT MOCK JOB INTERVIEWS AT WARREN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

PowerNet's original organizers surveyed over 200 families and discovered a common concern: young adults were involved with criminal activity, and they returned to that life again following arrest and conviction. Residents saw the need for new solutions to end the cycle.

"We needed to go down to the street corner, talk to the guys who continued to sell drugs, and find out what it would take to get them to stop," says Dr. Jerrie McGill, president of PowerNet's board of directors.

From those initial steps grew PowerNet's GEM Leadership Development Program, which relies entirely on community volunteers—many of them experts in fields such as criminal justice and human behavior—to give inmates essential training and reinforcement prior to release. Training topics include self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, cognitive behavior, career planning, and individual coaching.

"We utilize what are known as 'evidence-based practices' in our work with the inmates," says Joan Cutlip, an executive coach and corporate trainer who

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Dear Friend of CCHD:*

This is a time of both transition and recommitment for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). The Catholic bishops of the United States have adopted a plan to re-organize and carry out their Conference's mission in more organic and collaborative ways. Under this plan, CCHD will be an integral and central part of a new Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development. The new department will bring together CCHD's grant making, education, and related activities and connect them more closely with the Conference's social justice policy development, advocacy, and ongoing education on the Church's social mission.

Meanwhile, CCHD faces its own internal changes. Tim Collins, who served CCHD so well for 37 years, has retired, and I am honored to serve as interim director of CCHD. I have always believed, and often said, that CCHD is the best way to practice the principles of Catholic social teaching that we preach and teach. CCHD is an example of the "option for the poor" and the principles of participation, subsidiarity, and solidarity in action. CCHD is not simply a collection; it is not just another program; it is the Gospel at work.

In this time of transition and renewal, I believe the best way to reaffirm and demonstrate our common commitment to CCHD will be to make every effort to increase the CCHD Collection in the fall. In this way, our message of priority for the poor and our mission of empowering poor families and communities can make a greater difference in our nation.

I hope you enjoy these stories about how CCHD is supporting the impressive work of PowerNet at the Dayton Correctional Institution (DCI). Addressing the growing community concern around recidivism, this innovative initiative has already helped more than two dozen offenders overcome obstacles to make a positive return to society. The program is so successful that local, state, and federal officials are now encouraging its implementation in other Ohio correctional facilities.

Later this fall, on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, most parishes will take up the CCHD Collection, which provides most of the funding for CCHD's grant and education programs. The Campaign's work, illustrated by PowerNet's outreach, expresses and depends on solidarity. It cannot work without the generous support of individual parishioners like you. If you are interested in getting involved with CCHD in your local area, please contact us at 202-541-3210, or find your local diocesan director at [www.usccb.org/cchd](http://www.usccb.org/cchd).

We are so grateful for your ongoing support of the Church's remarkable efforts to live out the Gospel call "to bring good news to the poor . . . and proclaim liberty to captives" (Lk 4:18) in communities across our land.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

John L. Carr  
Interim CCHD Director

### WHAT IS CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed over \$280 million to more than 7,800 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so that CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between poor and non-poor persons.

### USCCB/CCHD COMMITTEE

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### OBSERVER

Brian Stevens  
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became a volunteer after hearing Powell speak at her parish, St. Francis of Assisi in Centerville, Ohio. Cutlip also provides inmates with a 30-hour personal development program and individualized counseling.

Many inmates struggle to complete the program. Eighteen months prior to release, inmates are invited to join. They are expected to attend weekly group meetings, serve in leadership roles, and complete monthly individual counseling sessions. A Citizen Circle—a group of community volunteers—guides progress during the program and after release. The support system continues for up to three years after graduation.

From the first class of 180 registrants, only 12 graduated, but they were the strongest candidates for successful re-entry. Among them was Lamont Brown (see profile), who now plans to earn a college degree.

“I didn’t know how to be a leader, and they challenged me,” Brown says. “We had to come, participate, and show interest in the program. Everyone had to abide, and we took the group seriously. Looking back, it was the best thing for all of us.”

United States District Court Judge Walter Rice, of the Southern District of Ohio, describes PowerNet’s work as invaluable.

“They’ve helped advance the changing paradigm of re-entry, which begins with the first minute of sentencing,” he says. “They are educating the community that we all have a stake in a successful re-entry, as a means of rebuilding neighborhoods, cities, and the tax base. I’ve grown tired of seeing the children of those I’ve sentenced be sentenced themselves. We must do everything we can to help the ex-offender successfully re-enter.”

PowerNet also works with the community to implement a comprehensive and effective support system for the graduates and other ex-offenders who are referred for assistance. PowerNet builds relationships with community-based service providers, together with education, training, and employment organizations, to provide opportunities for success.

Jeff Cranford is an ex-offender who serves as a PowerNet workforce development volunteer. He builds relationships with local businesses to help create employment opportunities for the GEM graduates.

“I’m an advocate for these guys because I’ve been there and experienced it,” he says. “Being able to sell PowerNet’s vision to potential employers allows us to show them how the GEM graduates will be assets to their company.”

**“This is a revolutionary program, not just a bandage. As volunteers, we all care about the inmates. We want to help them make wise choices that will teach them new skills and allow them to become leaders in the community. They are breaking the cycle.”**

—Joan Cutlip

The success of the GEM program at DCI has not gone unnoticed. County officials recently entered into a formal agreement with PowerNet to begin a pilot program that will improve ex-offenders’ access to workforce development, child support, and social service resources.

“Our focus now is to break down the policies that prevent ex-offenders from obtaining a

place in the community,” Powell says. “This is the type of systemic change we are working to impact.”

Ed Rhine, PhD, deputy director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation’s Office of Policy and Offender Reentry, is impressed by the GEM program’s impact on participants.

“PowerNet’s careful program design and implementation with DCI Warden Lawrence Mack and his staff has resulted in participants who are enthusiastic and always show a positive demeanor. I’m optimistic about the future of this unique program, as it demonstrates what can be done when local stakeholders with a keen interest in achieving successful reentry outcomes join forces with reform-minded correctional administrators.”

Cutlip, the executive coach, agrees: “This is a revolutionary program, not just a bandage. As volunteers, we all care about the inmates. We want to help them make wise choices that will teach them new skills and allow them to become leaders in the community. They are breaking the cycle.”

THE POVERTY LINE

**Millions of hard-working Americans struggle to keep food on the table and a roof overhead.**

A family of four is said to be living at the poverty line when their annual income is \$19,971—but two adults working full-time at minimum wage jobs, with no time off for illness or vacation, barely make that amount. And what happens if a parent needs to stay home with a sick child, the employer downsizes, or the rent is raised?



# LAMONT BROWN—A GEM OF A GRADUATE

BY CHRISTOPHER C. KELLY, CCHD VOLUNTEER

Lamont Brown has lived a hard 31 years. Born and raised in a Cincinnati public housing development, he believed his life was headed for failure. On the streets at age 10, arrested at 13, and jailed for the first time at 18, he knew little about staying in school or getting an education.

“I grew up in a serious neighborhood with serious crime,” he says. “In the project I lived in, everyone went to prison. If they are not dead, they are locked up, or still standing in the same spot with the same plans as before.”

After he was sentenced to Dayton Correctional Institution in 2003—his third incarceration—Brown vowed to change. That’s when he first heard about PowerNet’s GEM Leadership Development Program. He applied and, in June 2004, joined the first class of inmates preparing for a new way of life after release.

GEM program officials challenged Brown and his classmates, instilling in them values and leadership skills to help reduce the chance of recidivism. During the course of the program, Brown’s classmates elected him president. With that responsibility, Brown learned how to run executive board meetings, write proposals, and make business decisions. Brown also learned to interact with state officials who could incorporate changes to the system that will improve ex-offenders’ chances of not returning to a life behind bars.

Brown’s class learned about “The Psychology of Incarceration,” a cognitive-behavioral group program taught in multiple sessions by Wright State University professor and PowerNet volunteer Robin Herman, PhD.



LAMONT BROWN, A PROUD GEM PROGRAM GRADUATE, CREDITS THE PROGRAM AND THE COMMITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS FOR HELPING HIM MAKE LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS.

“He taught us to tap into our inner strengths,” Brown says.

Joan Cutlip, another PowerNet volunteer, emphasized to the group the importance of viewing themselves as successful.

“If you don’t, others won’t,” Brown says. “It’s important to have respect for yourself and others.”

Released from prison on July 1, 2007, Brown is currently working with Herman to facilitate a class about incarceration for students at Wright State. Brown also recently applied to Cincinnati State to pursue a degree in sociology. In the meantime, since he’s also an experienced cabinetmaker, he is seeking employment in that field. Through all these changes, Brown is sustained by a supportive family and mentors at PowerNet.

“I used to be confused and angry, and didn’t think that anything other than selling drugs on the street would help me get by,” he says. “This is the first time that, after I got out of prison, I feel very good about my life. The GEM program helped put my thoughts in the right perspective.”

Of his experience with GEM volunteers, Brown says: “It was beautiful to see that people cared about us who didn’t know us. They were willing to help us change our lives.”

## WHERE’S MY MONEY GOING?

All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD’s anti-poverty mission. CCHD abides by the charitable standards set by a leading donor advisory service. Our funds are divided as follows: 89% is assigned to CCHD’s core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, education programs, and supporting services; 3% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal; and 8% is assigned to administrative costs.

**We thank you for helping to break the cycle of poverty through your ongoing support for CCHD.**