



A LIFE IMPROVEMENT BUSINESS<sup>SM</sup>

# FACES OF BCPS

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Returning Citizens Career Fair**  
February 6th, 2023



**Annual Awards Celebration**  
April 18th, 2023

### Save the Date

Our annual Life Improvement Awards Breakfast will be taking place this on April 18th at the DoubleTree by Hilton, Reading. Please be on the lookout to purchase your ticket once they become available on our website. We hope to see you there!

For more info, visit our website: [www.berksconnections.org](http://www.berksconnections.org)

## MOTHER'S / FATHER'S VOICE



The Mother's/Father's Voice Program is back\*! Through this program, incarcerated mothers and fathers of young children are recorded reading a storybook to their child. The BCPS Community Outreach team creates a DVD and sends it along with the book to the child. The child can then watch the video of Mom/Dad reading while following along in the book.

This provides a sense of closeness between the parent and the child that would otherwise not be possible and promotes the importance of reading.

\*Mother's/Father's Voice volunteers are going through the onboarding process with the jail and we anticipate that they will begin volunteering in March. Since September, BCPS staff have been administering this rewarding program.



Stanley Gracius, known fondly as Mr. Thank You, is certainly a client to remember! He joined the R3 program and quickly became an integral member of Cohort 25. At the R3 graduation ceremony, Stanley was offered a job! He loved what the job entailed, but due to transportation issues, he was forced to resign. Eager to work, Stanley came back to BCPS, where he received support from our employment specialists. He utilized the Computer-Based Learning Center (CBLC) to help him search for a new job. Today, he works at Custom Processing Services, which he feels successful and proud!

Stanley is always willing to speak in front of an audience to share his story. He encourages new clients when he attends the R3 alumni dinners, R3 graduations, and orientations. Cohort 25 was a tight-knit group, and Stanley makes sure to stay connected with them.

Throughout his journey with BCPS, he always wore a smile. Stanley is a great example of the saying "If you put the work into anything, you can be successful."

*"Without BCPS having my back, giving me that second chance, and the employers who were willing to take that chance, who knows where the next chapter of my life would have been."*



Yolanda Evans, a Reentry Works client, is working closely with her Case Manager, Logan. She frequently visits our office to make use of the CBLC to look for employment opportunities. She was recently accepted into the Peer Support Certification training program, the next step in her goal of becoming a Certified Peer Specialist. Yolanda hopes to find a position working with people who struggle, as she did, once she receives the certification.

*"When I came to BCPS a lot of doors opened for me. They helped me with my resume, getting my license, and looking for employment. Logan is so supportive - the best there is out there. She worked patiently with me and took her time. They did not push me to do anything, only provided me with support and encouragement, so I kept coming back. Before BCPS, I was afraid of failure and success, but now I am confident, persistent, and so proud of myself."*



Ruben Gonzalez became a BCPS client in 2021, when he was still an inmate in Berks County Jail. With the help of his BCPS Reentry Coordinator, he explored employment opportunities. With a focus on welding, he watched informational videos and created his resume. When he was released, he utilized the CBLC to renew his driver's license, edit and finalize his resume, and search for a job. Within two weeks, Ruben received a job offer.

This past summer, he joined the R3 program with Cohort 27. At Berks Career and Technology Center, he connected with his welding instructor, who had also taught his brother. His instructor became one of Ruben's biggest inspirations. During his journey with the R3 program, he met with some of our past R3 alumni, who further motivated and guided him through the process.

Ruben is currently working at Morgan Truck Body and enjoying his job. In the future, he hopes to become a freelance welder and travel the world.

*"I am very appreciative of BCPS. If it wasn't for their help, I would still be in a bad place. Don't ever let anyone tell that you that you cannot do it. I am proof that you can."*

Berks Connections/ Pretrial Services

### Berks Connections/Pretrial Services

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# October Career Fair Highlights



**PERFORMANCE**  
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A PROUD SPONSOR OF THE  
**Returning Citizens  
Career Fair**

On October 3rd, BCPS held its second **Returning Citizens Career Fair** of 2022. The event was open to anyone in the community who is on probation, or parole, or who has past involvement in the criminal justice or domestic relations systems. Over 35 second-chance employers joined us including, VIWINCO, Morgan Corp, New Castle Lawn & Landscaping, and more. These employers offer second-chance employment opportunities, which are life-changing for individuals.



**New Castle employees,  
Dan Marshall and Santos Almodovar**

At the event, Santos Almodovar, from New Castle Lawn & Landscaping, was present and actively recruiting individuals for the company. Santos was hired by New Castle at the BCPS **Returning Citizens Career Fair** 6 years ago.

Between 1999 and 2016, Santos was apprehended by the police two times. After being released in 2016, Santos was living in a halfway house and working a factory job; he was not content with how his life was going.

Santos decided to try his luck at obtaining a new job at BCPS **Returning Citizens Career Fair**. While attending the fair, Santos met Brad Stephenson from New Castle, who encouraged him to apply. Santos had no experience in landscaping, but he saw this as an opportunity to grow. Santos is now a manager and his pay has more than doubled since he started working with them.

*"I have been able to grow so much because of the opportunity that I got. They (New Castle Lawn & Landscaping) saved me from what was waiting for me in the streets. Finding you guys (BCPS and New Castle Lawn & Landscaping) has honestly saved my life."*

- Santos Almodovar

## Pardon Project of Berks County

### One Year Update

BCPS helps guide eligible individuals through the pardon application process, ensuring they understand the nuances of the application. Applicants are connected with trained volunteer Pardon Coaches to assist them in completing the pardon application and telling their stories thoroughly. This is a life-changing opportunity to finally break free from their past mistakes and live their lives according to their current potential.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Pardon Coach, email [BerksPardonCoach@BCPSreentry.org](mailto:BerksPardonCoach@BCPSreentry.org)

Do you want to begin your pardon application process? BCPS can help! Go to the Pardon Project page on our website: <https://www.berksconnections.org>.

**Since we launched the Pardon Project of Berks County last October of 2021, we have 28 Pardon Coaches, 28 applicants with a Pardon Coach, and submitted 16 applications to the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons!**

*Pardons give people who have changed their lives the opportunity to stop being defined by their worst mistakes.*



# Friends of BCPS Social

At the event, guests were treated to a cocktail hour, followed by a presentation of agency highlights by Co-Executive Directors, Peggy Kershner and Nikki Schnovel.

New Paul J. & Mary Kate Hoh Society members were also recognized, receiving a charcuterie board and wooden pen, both hand-crafted by BCPS clients during the R3 program.

Thank you to everyone that was able to join us for this special evening. We are very grateful for all the support.



**Christine Guistwite**



**Barbara Palmisano, Kate Hoh,  
& Eric Palmisano**



**Peggy Kershner, Vanessa Starr,  
Ruby Martin, & Nikki Schnovel**



**Adam Ciferri, Lori Stoudt, & Chloe Ciferri**

## Second Chance Libraries



Reading-area children have two more locations to find a good book to read! In August, BCPS delivered two little Second Chance Libraries to Brookline and E. J. Dives Playgrounds, in cooperation with Reading Recreation Commission. These Second Chance Libraries were crafted by BCPS clients in the R3 Program.

Nikki Schnovel, BCPS Co-Executive Director explained that *"Making these libraries and donating them to organizations provides an opportunity for R3 participants to not only sharpen the skills they have learned but to give back to the community as well. It is a win-win!"*

Berks County author, Dan Leppold, has deposited autographed copies of his children's book, *The Adventures of Rey the Kitten*, in each of the libraries.

Interested in placing a Second Chance Library? Contact [Development@BCPSreentry.org](mailto:Development@BCPSreentry.org)

## Proud Business Owner

After a motorcycle accident left him unable to walk and work, Leonel "Leo" Paulino turned to the streets to support his family. But the streets eventually caught up to him and he was incarcerated in 2009. After being released in 2013, he tried to clean up his act and started giving rides to friends from Scranton to New York. However, Leo was incarcerated once again in November 2013.

Leo was referred to BCPS after his release in 2017. He had hit rock bottom; he was homeless and disconnected from his family in New York City. This low point inspired him to turn his life around. With the help of BCPS, Leo explored jobs in the manufacturing sector.

But because of transportation issues, he lost his job. Having a record made finding a job challenging. Not having transportation made it even more difficult.

Leo saw the impact of not having reliable transportation first-hand and decided that he was going to save his money and start his own transportation business.

Leo presented his plan to his Case Manager and she connected him with one of BCPS's volunteers, **Jim Shankweiler**. Jim has served as a mentor to Leo and has guided him every step of the way in establishing his business.



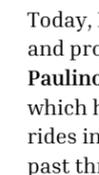
**FUN FACT**

**Leo was so determined to better his life, that one time he walked from Blandon to Reading after he was done with his work shift. In total, Leo had walked almost 13 miles at night.**



The remaining families were able to pick up their gifts at the drive-through event, which took place after the holiday party. Slapshot from the Reading Royals made the drive-through more lively and fun for the children.

**Thank you to everyone who helped us spread the holiday cheer!**



*"I owe him (Jim) my right arm. He has shown me that there's more to life than money. He has been a blessing. BCPS too; without them, I would probably be in jail right now. In the future, I want to help someone the way I was helped. I want to pay it forward."*



**Jim Shankweiler and Leo Paulino**

- Leo Paulino

# Holiday Magic

In December, 925 children with incarcerated, justice-involved, or at-risk parents received gifts through BCPS's Holiday Gift Project. This is the largest number of children we have served since the creation of this project in the 1980s. Thank you to the many generous community partners, churches, businesses, and individuals, who made the holiday season so much brighter for these families!

For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic started, we were able to hold our Holiday Care and Share Party in-person for children with incarcerated parents. The event was coordinated by Alice Moyer at West Lawn United Methodist Church. The families that attended the party decorated gingerbread houses, created festive arts and crafts, and of course, had a meet-and-greet with Santa Claus. But that was not all! They also received blankets from volunteers from Blankets of Hope and teddy bears donated by Godiva. And, Barbara Witman coordinated with the Nice Knitters at the Highlands and friends in Florida to knit scarves and hats for the children. At the end of the event, parents picked up the gift-filled Santa sacks, which were delivered by our volunteers.