

# COMING HOME 2017

## RYE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CONGRATULATIONS,  
COMING HOME 2017  
GRADUATES!

Celebrating the  
accomplishments  
of:

Travis Brown

Kevin Carroll

Melody Frost

Kalvin Harmon

Tee Jay Jackson

Michael McLean

Charles Moore

Jarming Ramirez

Chiwana Wright



## Social Justice in Action!

Building on its 25-year history of leadership in prison ministry, Rye Presbyterian Church (RPC) began its inaugural Coming Home program in January 2016, welcoming back into community men and women who had been imprisoned. With one program cycle of experience behind them, the congregation embarked on its second pilot year with enthusiasm and a commitment to bringing this high-quality program to even more individuals alienated by incarceration.

In 2016, the Rye program served five participants. By 2017, that number grew to nine, all paired with individual mentors from the congregation, and supported by many more congregants who cooked and served meals, shared their skills and talents, or simply broke bread with participants at the community dinners. The 2017 program originally had twelve participants, but some could not complete because of work, family or other commitments. For these individuals, we feel certain that the unconditional positive regard they experienced even in their

brief time with the program will not soon be forgotten.

The 2017 program met on Thursday evenings for 18 consecutive weeks. The evenings started with participants engaging in groups for learning and healing. The groups were followed by community dinners, one of the cornerstones of the program.

Rye's Coming Home program embraces an ongoing journey of discovery of what a *restorative community* offers for people who are coming home. As expressed by this year's graduates, experiences of isolation and alienation are countered through the quality of new relationships offered by people of faith. It has been important for people to discover their voice, to be affirmed and accepted. The experience of *restorative community* not only heals and nourishes participants, but enriches the congregation as well as congregants who begin to understand the larger systemic issues impacting marginalized populations.

### This Issue

2017 Graduates	p.1
Social Justice	p.1
Mentors	p.2
Yoga/Art Therapy	p.2
Workshop Leaders	p.2
Charles' Story	p.3
In Gratitude	p.3
John Miller Reflects	p.3
Participants Reflect	p.4
Words of Thanks	p.4



Graduate Kevin Carroll

## Charles' Story: From Participant to Leader



"The Coming Home program was essential to my growth. The honest sharing and communication I experienced there really transformed my view of myself and the world." These are the words Charles uses to describe his experience of the Coming Home program.

While incarcerated at the Fishkill Correctional Facility, Charles had come to know two congregants from the Rye Presbyterian Church, Bob and Nancy Steed, who ran support groups at the prison. When they suggested he join Rye Presbyterian's *Coming Home* program upon his release, he said yes without hesitation. "Because I had known them for years, I trusted their opinion. I wasn't apprehensive; I

was looking forward to the program," Charles says.

Charles, in his 30's, was the youngest of the participant group, but this didn't bother him at all. In fact, he appreciated the unique wisdom and life lessons the older participants had to offer. He was also moved by the honest reflections participants shared during the community meals, and how empathetically members of the congregation responded. "We were all different races and from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, yet we all earnestly bonded and supported each other." Charles is particularly appreciative of the relationship he formed with his mentor, and they keep in touch until this day.

Charles liked the program so much that he considered staying on as a volunteer for future programs. He was surprised and glad when the program staff offered him the Peer Facilitator position for the next program cycle. "I

would have done it for free, but I was glad they had enough confidence in me to make me a member of the staff," Charles says.

Charles has developed an Etiquette Program for men and women returning to community from prison, and as Facilitator at Rye this year, he shared some of this program with participants. Charles also led an excellent session on communication style and the power of effective communication. Charles continues to pursue his Etiquette business in his spare time, but is also employed full-time as a Residential Aid & Peer Specialist at a Men's Shelter in Manhattan. He also has repaired a strained relationship with his daughter. "All this is possible in large part because of the Coming Home program. I feel like I am a better person overall because of the program."

## Pastor John Miller Reflects on the Coming Home Program

"Being involved in the Coming Home program has been an eye-opening experience for me. Working with men on the inside of prison I get to hear about their hopes for when they go home. Engaging with returning citizens through this program has shown me how difficult this process is for many of the formerly incarcerated and has underscored the need for a variety of support systems to be in place for them.

The Coming Home program was a natural extension of a 25 plus year prison ministry at Rye Presbyterian Church. It has allowed a much larger number of our members to be engaged in ministry with the formerly incarcerated and thus has helped to change stereotypes that many hold about this population. Our members have gained as much as the participants as they serve as mentors, cooks, and dinner guests. The shared meal has a real sense of "coming home" to it."

### In Gratitude

A special thank you to RPC's Mission & Outreach Committee, The Coming Home Steering Committee, The Session, and dedicated congregation and staff. Thanks also to the Coming Home Leadership Team: **Janet Donat, Suzanne Katz, Charles Lewis, John Miller & Linda Otness.**

Immense gratitude to **Linda Otness**, who coordinated over a dozen volunteers to provide the delicious meals we enjoyed each week! And to **Nancy & Bob Steed**, whose years of prison ministry paved the way for Coming Home.



# Healing and Restoration with Yoga & Art Therapy

## MENTORS

## JOURNEY WITH PARTICIPANTS

Mentors and participants share a bond like no other. Mentors celebrate meals with participants, and walk with them throughout their program journey. Empathy, authenticity, respect and acceptance are the hallmarks of a healthy mentor-participant relationship. Thanks to all the mentors who took time out of their schedules to share themselves with participants:

- Wayne Atwell
- Sam Dimon
- Lars Ernst
- Larry Forsberg
- Bob Gay
- Victor Kiarsis
- Todd LaBaugh
- Gail Langeloh
- Mary Anne Massey
- Heather Miller
- Adrienne Rogers
- Ron Sizemore



Coming Home is a trauma-informed program, grounded in the findings of top researchers like Bessel van der Kolk, who uncovered the fact that trauma rewires the brain and changes the way people experience the world. Healing from trauma involves re-establishing a healthy connection between mind and body. Thanks to congregant Kim O'Connor, a Rye-based *Healing Arts Collaborative* brought two new trauma-informed workshops to the Rye Coming Home program. The *Healing Arts Collaborative* connects health and wellness practitioners to the community to foster a movement to slow down and breathe deeply. Based in the practice of Mindfulness, the workshops helped participants to better manage stress, enhance resilience, and nurture a sense of well-being, all in the context of connecting mind and body to heal from trauma. The yoga and art therapy classes are described below.



Collaborative  
Group Art Therapy  
Mural created by  
the Rye Coming  
Home 2017  
Graduates.

## Yoga

Linda Mackay led participants in a session of trauma-informed yoga. For many, it was their first experience with yoga. Taking their shoes off and lying on the floor seemed uncomfortable at first, but participants soon reaped the benefits. The yoga postures offer a unique opportunity to both strengthen the muscles and stretch areas that carry tension. This, along with an emphasis on breathing and mindfulness, is why yoga is often called a “mind/body” practice – it can get people in touch with their sensations and emotions, which is so important for trauma recovery.

## Art Therapy

Gloria von Oiste led an Art Therapy session that involved participants coming together to create a collaborative group art therapy mural, that would hang in the Community Room at RPC. Murals have multiple therapeutic benefits such as opening opportunities for discussion, building a sense of unity, enhancing the environment, and increasing self-esteem. The participants worked together on coming up with a concept for the mural, and then worked as a team to implement their ideas with paper and paint. The end product was an amazingly beautiful mural, and a group of participants who could be proud of the time, thought and effort they put into it.

## Workshop Leaders & Presenters...

Coming Home 2017 included workshops on yoga, storytelling, communication skills, managing finances and more. Thanks to those who dedicated their time and talents to the Rye Coming Home Program:  
**Elena Falcone, Charles Lewis, Linda Mackay, Rebecca Mazin, Gloria von Oiste, Eric Waters & Lee Woodruff.**



# Reflections from Graduation

The 2017 Coming Home Graduation was attended by over 75 people, including congregants, community members, friends and family members of participants. The reflections below, gathered at graduation from participants and mentors, convey the powerful impact the program has on participants' lives:

"You are my extended family.  
When I fell, you were there  
for me."

"This is a place to  
share dreams."

"I learned three things: the power of a  
loving community, loving heart and open  
mind."



"These are people who believe in forgiveness, in a second chance."

"Unconditional love is what this has been about."

"When I was broken, it helped me keep a spark of hope."

## Words of Thanks

We would like to thank The Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty, an organization with a rich history of partnering with faith organizations to promote social justice. This year, Rye Coming Home mentors had an expanded day of training experience with the Beck team along with on-site training support. Beck supported, through supervision, Suzanne Katz, a social work intern for 2017. She was a valuable resource for participants, staff and community members throughout the program.

Ongoing Coordinator Meetings and Learning Collaboratives provided support in the use of the restorative community model. Beck's data-intensive program evaluation ensures that Coming Home at Rye has information to support continued success in providing a responsive program that meets the unique needs of returning citizens.

Janet Donat, MEd., has been an invaluable leader of the Rye Coming Home Program with her special skill in graciously supporting a vibrant community program. She is the coordinator of the Emerge Program and a parent educator at Family Services of Westchester. She made important contributions to the Restorative Community Collaborative throughout the year. We are grateful to Janet for her wisdom and commitment and wish her well on her continued journey as she departs the Rye Coming Home team. Her inspirational graduation reflections and the heartfelt sharing throughout the program will be remembered. Thank you so much Janet!!

A special thank you to Suzanne Katz. Her commitment and engaging style was an important contribution to participants progress during the Coming Home program. Suzanne's many talents fostered a creative and healing environment for all. Of note, Suzanne continues as a part of the Beck team, including crafting this newsletter!

**The Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty**  
Fordham University  
Graduate School of Social Service  
400 Westchester Avenue  
West Harrison, NY 10604  
Phone: 914.367.3436  
lightburn@fordham.edu  
www.fordham.edu/beckinstitute

**Rye Presbyterian Church**  
882 Boston Post Road  
Rye, NY 10580  
914.967.0842  
www.ryepc.com

For information about how to get involved with Rye Coming Home, please contact: John Miller: [jmiller@ryepc.com](mailto:jmiller@ryepc.com)