Around

Jonathan Street

Aaron Hill shares his story at workshop

By
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It was yet another stepping stone for Aaron Hill, a resident of Jonathan Street, who was invited to attend the GAINS Center Workshop as an advocate for men.

The workshop was held on Thursday, Nov. 30, at the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda, Md.

GAINS stands for (Gathering information, Assessing what works, Interpreting/integrating the facts, Networking, Stimulating change.)

David Washington, program coordinator, TAMAR Program, (Trauma Addictions, Mental health and Recovery) said this was an honor for Hill who sat on the panel with several prominent participants from around the United States.

Hill said he thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and noted he was first thankful to Bonnie Beachley, who suggested (to David Washington) to be considered to participate and then to Noel Thomas, project associate, National GAINS Center, for extending the invitation.

Hill said they discussed what GAINS could do to help eliminate gangs within the prison (and streets), reduce rapes inside jail and how to handle the rape once it occurs — dealing with fear, guilt and retaliation. They also discussed correctional officer training, culture change and additional programs to keep their minds occupied.

The biggest topic was COVA (Correctional Officers Veterans Affairs), about veterans in jail. In addition, participants discussed training curriculum for housing and how to assist inmates coming out and how to get landlords to help them during the transition between jail and the outside world.

Hill offered suggestions how to assist inmates so they can turn their lives around. He has been been in and out of prison and several treatment programs, but he has successfully completed the program and today is substance-free.

Part of his story

Hill was amenable in sharing parts of the story he told the group who attended the GAINS center workshop.

He began by telling when his addiction started — he remembers the date well — Aug. 14, 1986. His last use was Aug. 28, 2004. He had been incarcerated for several years — for months or years at a time as a result of his addiction. He has been through JSAP (Jail Substance Abuse Program) and RSAP (Residential Substance Abuse Program.)

The thing he remembers most is the passing of his (adoptive) mother, the late June Hill, who he admits now, was an enabler to his substance abuse. He also remembers the death of his father when Hill was 12 and remembers how he thought he had to become the "man of the house" because of it. That would also be part of his spiral into the world of addiction. But now, he is not ashamed to discuss his past because he says, "It's just that, the past!" He is now independent; gainfully employed and has his own car.

He wanted me to know that in addition to being thankful for the programs he has been through, he thanks God for his aunt, Gussie Keyes, and his uncle, Vincent "Binkle" Keyes, for their love and strong support!

He acknowledges that he still continues to go to meetings to discuss his addiction and that it has helped him to keep clean.

Now, for the first time since 1989, he has graduated from After Care, May 9, 2006, after trying numerous times before. He also says for the first time since 1988 he is about to complete his parole successfully.

He even remembers people heckling, "you'll be back," but with courage and determination, the help of programs such as the GAINS Center, the TAMAR program, and the love and support of his family, he has been on the road to success!

He also mentioned that completing the program is also due to his mentor, David Washington.

I am able to write all of this about Hill because he is proud to be a success story and he remarked, "If my story can help another youth avoid going through the trauma I have dealt with — it is worth sharing!"

Hill is a true champion for turning his life around. And with that I write..."Stay focused, Aaron, be encouraged and hold your head high as you continue your road of success!"

The TAMAR program is designed to help individuals learn to cope with the aftermath of childhood traumatic experiences as well as dealing with trauma as an adult.

The program includes trauma treatment, groups in the detention center as well as in some communities.

The TAMAR Program provides assessment and referral, treatment groups, connection to community case managements and peer support groups and connection to community agencies providing mental health, substance abuse social services and domestic violence services.

If you want to find out if the TAMAR group would be right for you or someone you know, contact David Washington at the Washington County Health Department at 240-313-2161.

The National GAINS Center's primary focus is on expanding access to community based services for adult's diagnosed with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders at all points of contact with the criminal justice system.

The center is committed to developing a comprehensive state plan for mental health and criminal justice collaboration and transforming the nation's fragmented mental health system and developing a recovery-oriented, consumer-driver system of care. If you are interested in finding out more about this program, contact Noel Thomas, 345 Delaware Ave., Delmar, N.Y. 12054.

Aaron Hill at workshop

From left, David Washington, program coordinator, TAMAR Program; Noel Thomas, project associate, National GAINS Center; and Aaron Hill, advocate for men at the workshop.