

Recently Released™ Has First Graduation Ceremony For FIT's Complete "100-Hour" Program

Dawn Riner Recognized on March 11, 2010

Dawn Riner, though not the first 100-Hour graduate of FIT's Recently Released™, community-based program in Bradenton, FL, is the first to be publicly recognized. She is at the center of the photo on the right.

Dawn first started with the *Free to Grow* class in the Sarasota County Jail with Linda Coker and Robin Rogari (shown on right). She graduated from that unit on November 2, 2008. Other courses

completed while in jail up until being released were *Parenting, Handling Loss and Grief, Insight, and Financial Recovery*. She completed the program after her release with the *Anger* unit with Glory Banstetter (above at left). All told, seven different FIT facilitators instructed Dawn: Glory Banstetter (3x), Linda Coker (2x), Madeleine Dreyer Basham, Susan Davis, Juliana Pace, Bonnie Tapley and Robin Rogari.



Recently Released™ routinely continues coursework begun in incarceration, many times the same week of release and with a familiar facilitator. Recently Released ministers to both men and women. Both the incarcerated and the released use FIT certificates to provide evidence of progress in terms of meeting parole or release requirements. The most notable tangible results have been the regaining custody of children upon completion of our units, most notably *Parenting 101, Godly Parenting, and Anger*.

Recently Released™ ... continues the coursework begun in incarceration

Reentry from Both Sides of the Fence – True Transition

This month's Newsletter emphasizes FIT's efforts to help clients before and after incarceration. Many of Dawn Riner's mentors while in jail are the same ones helping her now that she is out. Another FIT effort is its certificate program. Certificates are awarded to graduates in each of the eight units – both inside and outside of incarceration. For many, these certificates are prize possessions because they represent actual success in completing something constructive. There is a practical side to this as well. Certificates issued before release show evidence of working on a plan of improvement. Sometimes they actually allow for earlier release. Certificates issued after release are often part of a case plan as part of parole. They have even been used to regain custody of children. FIT certificates include the required, essential data: date, title of course, instructors, number of contact hours, and location.

FIT is All About Changes in Individual Lives



Change of thinking and attitude in the heart and mind of the individual is the main goal of the FIT program. The reward is seeing people actually make it in their personal and spiritual lives. Our clients have huge obstacles to overcome, but miracles happen. This is the reward for the FIT volunteer – to see God work a miracle right before his or her eyes.

At left are FIT facilitators Joe Moore (left) Jon George (right) and the backs of six of their Insight graduates at the Sarasota County Jail on April 6 of this year (jail policy does not allow us to show faces). Insight requires nine two-hour interactive sessions. The participants appreciate the intensity and focus of the groups.

Jon George has one former Insight student that stands out in his mind – Jeff Smith. Last year Jeff took Parenting 101 from Don Batterman and Anger Management from Gordon Thomas. Finally, he was released in January of this year while taking an Insight class from Jon George, but the story does not end there. Jeff found God, new Christian mentors, and a new life in jail. Upon release, Jon took Jeff to church and encouraged him to seek for God's guidance through the pastor's sermon. Jeff was struggling with choosing from among three places for a place to move to and start a new life. The pastor's message that day was on "Moab". This was like a confirmation to Jeff, as there is a Moab in Utah, one of the states he was considering. Today, Jeff is doing wonderfully and, according to Jon, is still as enthusiastic about God as ever. Jon and Jeff keep in close contact despite the many miles of separation.

The attitude and life lived "before God" and "after God" could not be any different, according to Jeff. Here is part of the testimony he sent us about the new life he has found:

"Before God, I was never a good student. I struggled all through elementary, middle, and high school only to drop out and get my GED. I tried to go to college and ended up failing out. Recently, God made it clear he wanted me to get an education. I am proud to say that I am currently enrolled at the University of Phoenix and have straight A's. Before God, I always worked hard for my money, never seemed to have any, and always worried about paying bills. His word says not to worry, "because who by worrying can add one hour to their life?" Since I have let God take the wheel, my bills have been paid. One way or another, when bills are due, a job just pops up. Before God, I lied. I was a thief. I lied to and stole from the only people in my life that ever gave me a chance, a hand up, and tried to teach me the proper character and principals needed to live a truly joyful life. God has helped me right the wrongs in those relationships and show them someone they can be proud to call a grandson."

It is results like this that inspires facilitators like Jon George and Joe Moore. They carry on in their work week after week with fragile and broken lives that others have given up on. The above testimony was a result of FIT asking Jon about the experience that most touched him. All told, FIT facilitators have awarded 1,791 graduation certificates representing 26,188 contact hours in the last 25 months.