

FEATURE EDITION: NETWORKING FOR CHANGE, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

This month we are featuring two testimonies of the power of influence that a loving network can provide. The first person, Johnny Evans, of Bloomington, Indiana, has been out of jail for 29 years now. The second, Albert Ferrara, is currently in prison but has been greatly helped by taking several units of our FIT curriculum while at the Hernando County Jail. Both stories show a dramatic change in attitude and behavior.

Johnny Evans' Story

The story of Johnny's beginnings is an all-too-familiar one. He came from a family with many alcoholic members, including his father, two brothers, and a sister. His alcoholism led to many periods of jail and prison confinement. Finally, his brother Jack learned that the police planned to ask Judge John Baker to put him away for 30 years because of his habitual criminal behavior. Jack asked to speak with the judge and pleaded with him, saying "he is not a criminal; he just has a drinking problem. Send him to (the) Richmond or Madison (IN alcohol treatment center)". The judge agreed, Johnny graduated and has now been free of alcohol and crime for 29 years. He was instrumental in leading his two brothers and sister to the Lord, and now nobody in his family has a drinking problem. Brother Jack helped him get a wrecker business and Johnny operated a garage for many years, but now he has retired and sells cars – six or seven a week! Judge Baker has asked him to speak to others about his story and how they can overcome. Johnny attributes his success to a praying mother, a brother that stood by him, a judge that gave him a chance, a rehab center that helped him to see things differently, and most of all, to his God. Now he tries to help someone every day that is down, either in spirit or financially. He gives thanks daily for the life things God has given him. This is in contrast to always asking for something in the former days.

Albert Ferrara's Story We first became acquainted with Albert while he was incarcerated at the Hernando County (FL) Jail. He has received our graduation certificates for our Parenting unit (twice) as well as the Loss and Grief, Anger Management, and Financial Recovery ones. Several members of our FIT network have had a part in providing the opportunity for Albert to flourish, but those who influenced him the most were FIT Brooksville Regional Director Rev. Tom Walter, Chaplain Mary Ellen Kerr, and facilitators Dion Cappucci, Tom Walter, David Blomquist, and Will Ingersol. All this support and working together is the vision of our FIT Network.

Here is Albert's story in his own words: Hello, My name is Albert J. Ferrara. I have been in the Hernando County Jail for almost two years. When I first came to the jail I was at "rock bottom". I just lost everything: my loved ones, all my material things. It was a very traumatic event in my life. I did not know where to turn at first. I was lost. Two weeks later I started to go to church with some of the other inmates I was



fellowshipping with. There I met Chaplain Kerr and Officer Ingersoll, very inspirational, godly people. As I started to attend church and Bible studies I met Case Manager Cappucci and other volunteers like Brother Tom, Dave, Leo, Marv, and John that are great people of the Lord, also. Then the Chaplain told me about the FIT programs that the volunteers were teaching in the jail. So I signed up for them, asking God for guidance and strength for what was happening in my life. I knew these programs were the way for me to help myself grow. As I was attending the FIT programs and church, God was working in my life. I was starting to see changes in myself and choices that I was making. The FIT programs and God's blessings were helping me to make decisions and giving me lessons for my mind, heart, and soul: (1) take it one step at a time, (2) don't skip skills, (3) stay focused, (4) embrace change, (5) when you're down, don't take action, (6) always reach for the sky, and (7) pray like you mean it. Now, about two years later, I am finishing up my FIT programs and the Lord is still working in my life. I am going to prison for a little while but not as long as they were saying – "life". But we need to ask ourselves this question: What do you envision? Never forget that this is your one, precious life, "your life", and you have the power to create your future. I have prayed to the Lord: "let me not leave anything undone that I can do, Lord". It sounds simple but we all need to put that into practice instead of whining and complaining. Just think what we can do with our lives and with the FIT programs that are available in the jails and prisons. You can learn to make right choices. Never give up and never stop believing, and it is never too late to start.

"All things are possible through God". Thank you.

Albert J. Ferrara

Comment from FIT curriculum developer, Don Pratt: We are so proud of Albert. His maturity and clarity of personal purpose is just the kind of result we were looking for when we put together this curriculum which is so heavy in resources, leader personal commitment, and interaction.



Comment from Chaplain Kerr: I have been very proud of Al Ferrara as he worked the FIT program with due diligence. He would get up and be ready to come to the program ahead of time and always participated while in the program. He would personally share and encourage others to participate. I believe this was a very influential piece to his recovery and character building for his life. As Chaplain I have seen many go through the different sessions of the FIT program and am thankful for the volunteers and coordinator Tom Walter for seeing this program blossom the way it has at our facility. The material is very beneficial to a person's growth and recovery and prayerfully we will see less recidivism in those who participate.



-Mary Ellen Kerr, Chaplain, Programs Dept, Hernando County Jail, Brooksville, FL

Comment from Tom Walter: The FIT program is like an instrument fine-tuned that the Lord uses to help men and women and their families put their lives back together by learning life skills and spiritual growth. It is my privilege to have a part in the FIT program.



-Tom Walter, FIT Regional Director, Spring Hill, FL

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[Want to help a facilitator buy materials for his/her class?](#) With the economy downturn, we are no longer getting the funds that were available before to provide free materials to our volunteers who are willing to donate their time. A typical class costs \$150. As a result, fewer classes are being conducted. 941-739-1338.