

# 2017 YEAR IN REVIEW: Strengthening Lifelines Behind And Beyond Bars



**HEALING  
BROKEN  
CIRCLES**

At **Healing Broken Circles**, we enter 2018 excited for what's to come and for what we've done – *together*. You helped make 2017 a year of new programming and new opportunities at LifeLine and at HBC Downtown . . . a year of new connections and partnerships that deepened the benefits and extended the reach of our work. While 2017 was not without its unexpected bumps, we thrive, learn, grow, adapt, and continue to serve. Your belief in HBC has helped us every step of the way! We couldn't be happier to share the impact of your support in this look back at 2017.

In gratitude,

## LifeLine @ Marion Correctional

This year in LifeLine we were able to offer over 30 unique classes, serving on average 350 students per quarter, plus special events reaching approximately 400 more inside participants, as well as 217 outside participants. Some ways in which we increased our impact at Marion Correctional include:

*"We think of a lifeline as a rope. You grab it and someone else pulls you up. But that's not it at all. LifeLine is a vein already inside us. Mine was a faint, barely pulsing trickle. But in here, I found it and I strengthened it, and now it courses through me."*

— **Dion**, student and volunteer at LifeLine Reentry Community Center at Marion Correctional.

### Expansion of higher education through HBC's University Inside

We now have seven regular university instructors, a long list of others expressing interest, and two classes that are now receiving college credit! This was made possible through our partnership with Otterbein University, and by extending the opportunity to Piper Kerman's writing classes we are able to reach even more incarcerated students. Fifty-eight students from both Marion Correctional and the Ohio Reformatory for Women now have a transcript from Otterbein with credits transferable to any institution of higher education.

### Thriving Path growing + NEW Yoga Teacher Training program

Yoga in prison was a hard sell when we began five years ago. Persistence pays off.

We are now able to offer almost daily opportunities to practice yoga and mindfulness meditation. With an average of 40 students per class, our Thriving Path program also encompasses instruction on anatomy, positive touch, breathing techniques, and resilience techniques for emotional self-regulation. And, very exciting, we have 11 men enrolled in our Yoga Teacher Training program—they are soaking up history, philosophy, anatomy, the ethics of teaching, and also the business of yoga. In mid-2018, each should receive an in-prison, trauma responsive yoga certification. Our next goal is to partner to develop a viable continuation teacher certification program on the outside.



*“Recreational drugs were once a way of life for me. Now I don’t even take mental health drugs and have been sober for almost a year. Yoga has allowed control in my life like never before. I have drive and purpose. This is the first time in my life that I’ve had hope of being a productive individual.”*

— S



Results of Thriving Path, both self-reported and through the limited medical data that is available to us, show a lessening of psychosomatic dysfunction — better digestion, better sleep, decreased intensity of anxiety and depression. Some experience major insights into personal behavioral patterns and processing of childhood trauma. Prison staff are seeing the benefits too! To share just one example: a unit manager shared that she was preparing to transfer a prisoner because he was spiraling into destructive behaviors but began to notice a marked difference once he began our program (see S’s testimony to the left).

### **TEDxMarionCorrectional: Revisionist Destiny, December 29, 2016**

Technically 2016, but with a glow that lasted into 2017, we hosted over 350 at our 5th TEDx. We had an unexpected celebratory moment when, during the event, an MCI administrator announced that Ohio Governor John Kasich had tweeted about our work and our founder Jo Dee Davis. From a TED survey of our event, here are just a few comments from outside guests:

*“The fact that this event is in prison, and is not an event in which people come to ‘view’ or exoticize incarcerated people, means that this is an event where community is built regardless of race, class, or current status in society. We desperately need events like this in our world.”*

*“The Marion men put on a highly professional, mind-shifting, heart opening event during which we had a chance to really connect to the humanity in these men behind bars.”*

*“Excellent talks. And so much opportunity for conversation. And it was not just a bunch of people at an event, it became a community, it really did.”*

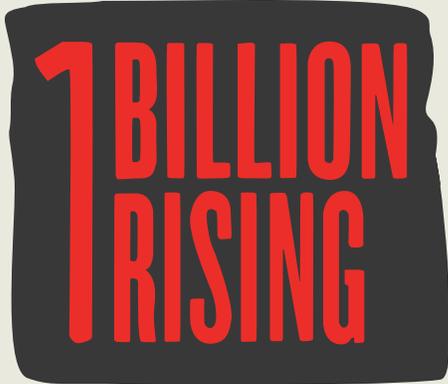
*“That day will stick out in my mind as one of the most influential in my life.”*

### **Workshop and Poetry Jam with Bryonn Bain, March 25 & April 9, 2017**

Los Angeles author, academic, and performer Bryonn Bain (*Lyrics from Lockdown*) spent two days with LifeLine’s community of poets and musicians for a workshop,

culminating in a poetry jam. MCI musicians played guitar and cajon. Bryonn’s New York and L.A. musicians added cello and an upright bass. While Bryonn, our seasoned poets, and first-timers – buoyed by the community of support – filled the prison hallway with rhythm, melody, and spoken word.





*“Yesterday I had one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. I don’t even know how to describe it. All I know is that it took incarcerated men sharing song, dance, poetry, and autobiography about their own complicity in gendered violence and inequality to begin to heal my post-election heartbreak. They were so talented, and thoughtful, and kind—to me and to one another. On my way out one of them said, ‘Come back soon to see one of our plays; bring your friends and your students. We are still alive in here.’ Men who made mistakes at seventeen are at thirty taking gender studies classes and teaching their own courses on coding, or Plato. They are so very much alive in there.”*

— **Sandra Macpherson**,  
a first-time guest at HBC’s  
One Billion Rising event

---

### **One Billion Rising, February 12, 2017**

For the third year, we joined the One Billion Rising (OBR) movement. The men at Marion Correctional rose in solidarity to end exploitation and violence against women, with an evening of poetry, talks, music, and dance. Along with curriculum focused on gender oppression and women’s experiences globally, this year we deepened the event by connecting it to an 11-week college-level class on feminist theory. The men who made up our OBR organizing committee came from that class of 30 students. Some of their comments from class evaluations:

*“For many years I have known that I am a walking, talking statistic; participating in this course has shown me that even my own observations of fitting all the stereotypical descriptions that haunt my generation were very, very wrong. The picture is so much larger than I ever thought.”*

*“When you teach me something and it clicks, I want to run and tell others with the hopes they have their own revelation with the information, and collectively we can now communicate on a new and different level.”*

*“The issues of gender are mind blowing in their scope and depth. All too often I think we go with the status quo, engaged in an ignorant bliss that shields us from the ugly truth. You have given me a heightened sense of awareness and it is fascinating the amount of information that we take for granted. I am still working to see the finer points and am attempting to connect the dots as they relate from gender to sex to race, etc. I see where education and awareness can go a long way to combating the fear, ignorance, and anger that perpetuates the culture of discrimination and intolerance.”*

*“This class has opened my eyes to the amount of unconscious gendering we do everyday.”*

*“Feminist thinking has changed my thoughts to a more communal way of thinking.”*

---

### **TEDxDonovanCorrectional**

HBC provided technical assistance to TEDxDonovanCorrectional, Donovan being a men’s prison in California. Their curators shadowed HBC as we prepared for TEDxMarionCorrectional, and we attended and assisted their event the following spring. Donovan is now planning for next year. It is the only other prison to host a second TEDx event. This is key to HBC’s DNA: one-time exposure is good, but deep experience and embodied practice is transformative.





In one night, volunteers from DSW and the HBC community came out to paint and spruce up our HBC Downtown office and programming space. (generously donated by St John's UCC)

## HBC Downtown

In 2017, we were able to grow our outside program! HBC Downtown is a space of **community and learning**, responsive to those reentering—whether from incarceration, addiction or other adversities—but not a “reentry” space. For us, this is an important distinction: if the goal is community integration then we need to involve the whole community. HBC Downtown also operates as a hub for **public education and advocacy**.

### Programming

While HBC Downtown runs on volunteer time and energy, in mid-2017 we were able to hire Ezra Foster as our (very) part-time HBC Downtown Coordinator. Ezra was a LifeLine Program Aide during his incarceration. It is very meaningful for us to enable someone to use professionally, on the outside, the high-level skills in facilitation, programming, and group dynamics that he learned and practiced in LifeLine. To build a continuum of teaching and learning on the outside that, among other things, enables communities to benefit from the numerous talents and skills of people who have been incarcerated is a top priority for HBC.

At HBC Downtown, we offer a regular gathering for support, community, and information about opportunities and resources. New programs we are looking to build in 2018 include:

- Playback Theater, an original form of theater in which members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot.
- Computer Empowerment, a partnership with a local business owner to teach at-risk youth and reentering citizens computer hardware and software skills, building a pipeline to skills, jobs, and opportunities to give back.
- Trauma and Resilience, a 4-part workshop series, with info and interventions.

### Public Education and Advocacy

In 2017 we were able to, not just broaden our network, but activate these new connections with convenings and collaborations. And, as much as we have been able to share our expertise, we have been able to learn from others:



Rob performed a lot during his time with LifeLine inside, but hasn't had the chance since his release. When he came to HBC Downtown — a 2-hour drive on a rare night off from his three jobs—we asked if he wanted to sing for us. Listen to Rob perform “[Bésame Mucho](#),” almost as he sang it for TEDxMarionCorrectional in 2015.

### R3 Legislative Luncheon: Rehabilitation-Restoration-Redemption

With three criminal justice bills on the Ohio legislative agenda, HBC partnered with the Vincentian Ohio Action Network (VOAN) to bring together in dialogue legislators and those most affected by their pending legislation. At the Ohio

Statehouse Atrium, four speakers, each one a victim or perpetrator of a violent crime (or both), delivered powerful messages, their stories addressing the need for change in the system. We allowed time for small groups to gather in facilitated discussion, intentionally placing people with direct experience together with legislators and aides.

To bring, at this timely moment, a smart, engaging, edifying and welcoming event, right to the heart of state government was powerful and had immediate measurable influence. One Senator requested a meeting with us, resulting in more than an hour-long conversation. We are heartened by those in government who listen to and learn from those with direct experiences of the justice system.

### Ohio Prison Arts Connection

Sparked by our Theater of Conviction instructor, Jessie Glover, we partnered with the Ohio Arts Council, representatives of ODRC, and a core group of working artists across Ohio to establish and convene the Ohio Prison Arts Connection. The convening, held at Otterbein University, accomplished even more than we dared hope—shared stories, connections, ideas, frustrations, goals, and commitment to expand and advocate for the arts in the justice system and for resources to support the work.

Attendees came from around the state, with a number of ODRC employees from prisons close and far. The conference ended by joining a brilliant campus-wide talk by Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, and friend of HBC. Stevenson opened his speech with a request: “I’m going to ask you to do something,” he said to the packed auditorium, “I want you to change the world.”



*“The event was very powerful and sparked interesting conversation. There aren’t many places where you can have liberal professors, conservative community servants, and restored citizens around the same table discussing these issues.”*

— R3LL attendee





### The Big Table

Every year The Columbus Foundation urges the community to gather around a table in small diverse groups to talk. This year, HBC's Big Table, became two, as 24 people, representing a wide range of backgrounds and interests, came together to discuss how the city can transform the reentry experience and be transformed positively by those reentering. At the tables we had a deputy director from ODRC, a City Council member, former First Lady of the state of Ohio, case workers, addiction counselors, *The New Jim Crow* author Michelle Alexander, and a number of people who've experienced incarceration, including *Orange is the New Black* author Piper Kerman.

### More Convenings & Collaborations

As members of the Franklin County Reentry Coalition, we brought expertise to the Coalition's new First Step Friday Program

to connect reentering citizens with resources and support. We have deepened our relationship with Reform Ohio, a group of rabbinical leaders across the state taking action on criminal justice issues, and shared talks on social justice issues. Some highlights are:

At the **Ohio State University**, we presented and facilitated a discussion for incoming first year students on this year's "common book" *Just Mercy*. Sample reflections from those attending:

- "I learned something brand new and it challenged my beliefs."
- "I was able to actually talk to people who experienced many of the injustices explored in the book. It made the issues much more prominent and relevant than before."
- "This session helped me to better understand the book's theme of dehumanization. When in the prison system, people are stripped of the majority of their rights and treated as objects."
- "This session was very informational and also very engaging for the students because the speakers were very entertaining in the way they presented."
- "I learned that the prison system and its members are much more multifaceted than I could have imagined."

Invited by **Ohio University's** Center for Law, Justice and Culture, we spoke to undergraduates about the U.S. justice system and HBC's alternative community-centered pedagogy and integrative approach.

The **Wexner Center for the Arts** invited HBC to be a featured non-profit in the Take Action session of their annual Director's Dialogue on Art and Social Change, which featured a showing of "Pens to Pictures," a filmmaking collaborative wherein incarcerated women in Ohio write and direct original short films.





Along with new partnerships with established organizations, it has been especially rewarding to support young movement builders. Many are young people who've experienced the justice system and are driven to prevent other young people following in their footsteps and also are passionate about supporting those coming out of the system.



Our fall intern, OSU student Ray Wilson, is working towards a degree in public health, specializing in sociology and pre-law. She calls her time with HBC the professional highlight of her career – *to date*. With her talents, it will be but one of many.

**What brought you to HBC?**

It was HBC's approach to policy change, specifically demonstrated through the R3 Legislative Luncheon, which was not limited to policy issues, but discussed and dealt first-hand with the interplay between policies and individuals.

**What was most memorable?**

Hearing the stories and lived experiences of those who have gone through and experienced re-entry is definitely something I will not forget.

**What's next for you?**

I'm now working as a Page for the Ohio House of Representatives, as well as continuing my work with an after-school program for an at-risk middle school. I'm also applying for a few paid summer internships in DC, NYC, and Ann Arbor. Please wish me luck!

## Recognition for our Founder

We are grateful for The Kind Foundation's recognition of Jo Dee Davis. The KIND Award, granted in late 2016, amplified the unheralded, tireless, and essential work Jo Dee began over 15 years ago. In 2017, Jo Dee used this recognition as a platform to inform about tangible and tested alternatives to our punitive prison system, sharing HBC's approach, and inspiring others.

**Model of Leadership and Service Award (formerly Spirit of Crazy Horse Award), July 2017**

Jo Dee joins a prestigious group of former award winners, including Muhammad Ali and The Honorable Janet Reno, in being honored for demonstrating vision, compassion, and courage in meeting the needs of youth, families, and communities. Jo Dee was honored at the annual Black Hills Seminars, where she also led a workshop on addressing trauma and nurturing resilience.

**Galvanize Ohio, August 2017**

At the United States of Women two-day Galvanize Conference, Jo Dee suggested we all "hug a porcupine!" Invited to discuss the School to Prison Pipeline, Jo Dee reframed the topic as a "prenatal to prison pipeline" and, to a deeply engaged crowd, shared her humane and science-based approach: Sentence kids to a park not prison; Ask 'What happened to you?' not 'What did you do?'; and, yes, as prickly, mean, and scared as it might look, Hug that Porcupine.



## Building Organizational Strength

In 2017, we strengthened organizational capacity. We added two new Board members, Wendy Tarr and Wyatt Shimeall, and expanded our Advisory Board, welcoming Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow* and Joe DeLoss, Head Fryer at Hot Chicken Takeover and Fair Chance employer featured most recently on the *Today Show*. The two join *Orange Is the New Black* author Piper Kerman, Temple Israel Senior Rabbi Sharon Mars, and St. Francis College President Miguel Martinez-Saenz.

Along with new hire Ezra Foster, Amy Wharton also joined our team, bringing her extensive non-profit experience and expertise in development. We also had a wonderful intern, Ray Wilson, working with us this fall. In February, Kendra Hovey moved into the executive director position, enabling Jo Dee to focus more on curriculum and outreach in her role as founder. With a strategic plan to guide us, we enter 2018 a nimble, smarter, and stronger organization — informed, impassioned, and empowered to spread positive change together.



HBC staff, volunteers, and family with HBC Advisory Board member Joe DeLoss celebrating the launch of Hot Chicken Takeover at Easton.



Jo Dee, Ezra, Donte, and Kendra with Piper Kerman, HBC advisory board member, and R. Dwayne Betts, visiting poet