Project Return has added a new networking component to our Job Readiness Curriculum. Everyone knows that networking is a key strategy to gaining employment. For low-income job seekers, especially those who have the barrier of a criminal background, employment networks are even more important. Project Return clients have recently been released from incarceration and may not have an immediate sense of how to discover, activate, and grow their networks.

Thanks to support and training from the Nashville Workforce Network, we’re bringing the adage “who you know matters” to the Project Return classroom. Project Return hosted a Networking Event on August 1st. (Our special thanks goes out to Trevecca Community Church for the great venue!) Unlike a traditional job fair or resource fair, it was expressly billed for friendly conversations at tables in a coffee house environment - with several actual employers on hand to meet many job seekers - where Project Return participants practiced networking and made good connections. As just one example, when an employer in the hospitality industry talked with a Project Return participant that morning and heard about her experience in the construction industry, the employer immediately thought of her friend who works in human resources for a construction company, and offered to arrange an interview.

We are excited to be empowering people to network effectively and often!
Carol Creswell-Betsch gives her time in service of Project Return because she feels strongly about helping people who need a new beginning. Carol is Vice President of our Board of Directors. She has served on this board for many years and even worked briefly as the agency's interim director several years ago.

Carol is a graduate of Fisk University. She completed her masters in library science at Peabody College and her doctorate in counseling guidance and education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In addition to a successful career as a public school teacher (third grade) and librarian, Carol is a mother of two and grandmother of three.

Her civic involvement is extensive, and includes volunteering regularly at The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, as well as serving on the board of the Tennessee Repertory Theatre, the Community Advisory Board of Nashville Public Television, and the Vestry of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church.

Carol says, "I serve on the board of Project Return because Project Return consistently helps people. It is there to give people encouragement, and to really assist them in getting the new start that they are so in need of." Thanks to Dr. Creswell-Betsch for her continuous support and leadership!

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### News & Updates

**Over 1,200 Items Donated During July Suit Drive**

Thank you to Men's Wearhouse and all who participated in the 2013 Suit Drive! Over 1,200 items were donated, including over 350 suits, 90 shoes, 260 dress shirts, and 100 belts & ties. The Suit Drive supports Project Return's Better Suited program and provides like-new clothing to our participants for job interviews and important community events.

**“Pathways” Program**

Project Return has been selected by the U. S. Department of Labor as one of eight organizations nationwide to receive the Strategies Targeting Characteristics Common to Female Ex-Offenders Grant.* The goal of these awards is to provide employment-focused services and support, through an integrated strategy that includes empowerment and self-development, workforce development, education, and case management. The three-year initiative will allow Project Return to grow its "Pathways" program, providing additional services to meet the risk characteristics that are common to female ex-offenders, as well as job training and education.

Women represent 14% of Tennessee's prison population, as compared to a nationwide rate of 6.7% in state and federal facilities. Tennessee, like much of the United States, has seen a marked increase in the numbers of incarcerated women. Tennessee's female felon population has increased 50% over the past decade, and today's count is 238% greater than the total state female felon population of 20 years ago. We are pleased to have the opportunity to reach more people who need our services through this Department of Labor award.

*To learn more about Strategies Targeting Characteristics Common to Female Ex-Offenders grant, visit [http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/eta/ETA20131138.htm](http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/eta/ETA20131138.htm)
Prison In-Reach

Project Return visits local prison facilities regularly to help inmates prepare for reentry. This summer, we also participated in seven different in-prison resource fairs across the state, sharing information about how we can help those who will soon return to the Nashville area. Successful reentry can begin well before release!

Technology Grant

Many thanks to the Frist Foundation for its recent grant of $10,000 to Project Return. The Foundation makes technology grants available to qualifying nonprofit agencies, so that they may upgrade their office technology in an effort to better serve clients.

We will use our grant funds to develop and implement software that will enable us to better track and analyze our work and services. The new customized, top-notch system - covering everything from participant assessments and employment results to training effectiveness and donor relations - will enhance our ability to provide services and change lives.

We appreciate the Frist Foundation for its support, and all donors who support the work of Project Return.

Client Spotlight: Rhonda's Story

This summer, we hired our first employee through our social enterprise PROemployment. Rhonda's motivated, professional attitude earned her positive results and recognition.

During her second week in the Transitional Employment Program, Rhonda accepted a full-time position with a local employer. In her new full-time role, she is eager to utilize her experience in inventory management and operations. We are glad to have offered her a chance to enhance her resume with recent employment and a reference base.

Congratulations to her and best wishes for her continued success!

Project Return’s New Website

A new website is underway, thanks to our friends at the Horton Group. And a new office location is in our near future. Please stay tuned!

For now, here’s a "sneak peek" at our new logo.

Staff Member Spotlight: Maya Lochan

We are excited to welcome the newest staff member, Maya Lochan, to our team! Maya is Project Return's Development and Marketing Coordinator, helping us engage the community in our work.

Maya is a graduate of Wellesley College, where she studied Political Science and Women’s and Gender Studies. She has worked with several organizations in Nashville including Launch Tennessee, the Tennessee General Assembly, and the YWCA.
In the Community

Many Nashvillians in poverty are facing barriers to employment due to their criminal background. The "Pilgrimage for Jobs, Equity, and Fairness" highlighted this issue and Project Return's work on Monday, July 22nd.

Modeled after Gandhi's Salt March and the Selma to Montgomery March, the Pilgrimage was a 2.5 day, 22-mile walk through distressed communities in Nashville. The purpose was to draw attention to unemployment and poverty, and to lay the groundwork for policy agendas that address these crises.

We were grateful for the focus on this issue, and pleased to host Pilgrimage participants at the office of Project Return!