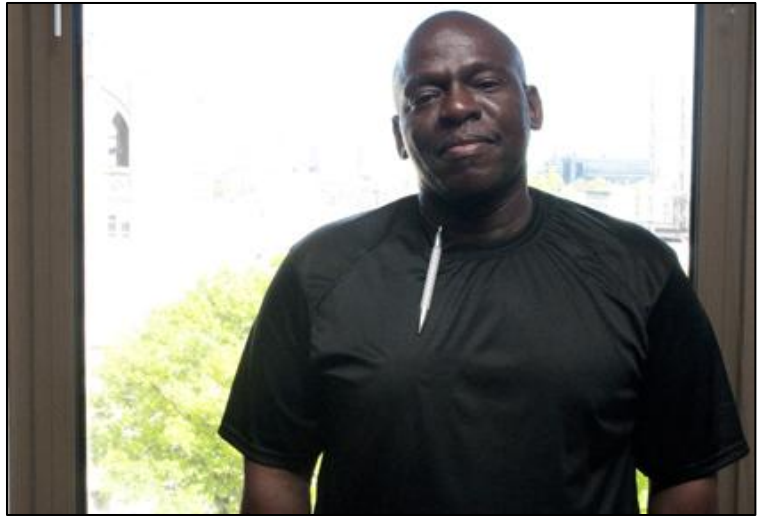


## **ARCHS' Reentry Partnership Paving a New Life Path for Ex-Offenders**

Living the life of an Eastern Missouri Correctional Center inmate proved to be as difficult as anyone could imagine for St. Louis resident Byron Brester. It was easy to see how decades behind prison walls could make an ordinary person lose hope. However, Brester was determined to prove he wasn't ordinary.



He enrolled in ARCHS' Reentry Mentoring Partnership to help pave the way for a new life path. Brester knew through help, he could exit prison with a route toward permanent employment and freedom from substance abuse that plagued him before his incarceration.

In 2008, ARCHS was the only recipient in the State of Missouri to receive Federal Second Chance Act funding for \$265,944 to create a pre and post prison release mentoring program to serve non-violent offenders. ARCHS works with Missouri Department of Corrections, Missouri Board of Probation and Parole, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri, GUIDES Family Life Center, Humanitri, Institute for Peace and Justice, and Helping Offenders Maintain Stability (HOMS) to implement the grant.

Brester knew when he got out of prison that obtaining a job was a necessity that could not be overlooked. Yet, getting a job meant a new level of responsibility, and that meant being clean. Then he met the members of the HOMS staff, and that made all the difference.

Today, Brester works as a cook for two Central West End restaurants and is happy to report that he has found his niche.

"I'm 47, and I'm just starting my life," he said.

Brester said thanks to ARCHS' Reentry Mentoring Program, he was provided with all the tools needed to succeed in his new post-prison life. He was given resume and employment instruction, and a strong support system that he quickly came to regard as friends. Brester said the HOMS' staff really took their time with him and "helped me be a better man."

Together, the reentry partnership and Brester built a superior life to the one he lived before and in prison. Mentors were there for him when he considered turning to old ways and told him to "just hang on, don't quit".

He stayed in frequent contact with his HOMS mentors, and they helped him stay positive and clean.

“Without the HOMS staff and everything I received throughout the mentoring, I would have never stayed on the right track,” he said, while shaking his head. “A support system is what any man needs, no matter what you feel, you need that,” he said, “Grab onto someone who will give their time to you, and of course never give up.”

Someday, Bresteer plans to open up a coffee shop and quick serve style restaurant at a location near the intersection of Delmar and Kingshighway. He hopes in some way the restaurant will help cater to recovering addicts. He says he wants to give back and help others in similar situations to his own so they don't experience what he went through. Creating this safe haven is a step in that direction.

“There are a lot more [people] that could use this program that just don't,” Bresteer said, “If you want the help, you can get it, but you have to want it.”