

# Options

## NEWSLETTER

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ADDICTION



*David Coady, former Options' Executive Director; Al Sassar, OMCP Supervisor; Tom Gorham, former Options' Executive Director; and Michael Hibdon, OMCP Director, addressing OMCP participants over the years.*

### First Options' OMCP Graduation in Los Angeles

On March 12, 2023, 22 participants graduated from Options' Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) program at California State Prison, Los Angeles County. This was the first class to graduate from the Los Angeles County facility – and the first to graduate at a “Level 4” site – a site for the most violent and dangerous men in prison. Emily Alpert Reyes' article in the Las Angeles Times (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-03-12/addiction-counselors-lancaster-california-prison-graduation>) documents some of the remarkable transformations in the graduates' lives: “I never thought I could be anything other than what I've been all my life,” one graduate said. Now, he said, he had gotten his GED and started picking up college credits in psychology, communications and social science. His goal, once released, is to return to work again in the prison system. “And this shows that there's an opportunity for us. That we're needed and wanted. It's funny that even though I'm in prison,” he said, “this is the happiest I've ever felt in my life.”

## Letter from the Fund Development Committee Chair

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to present this June 2023 Newsletter highlighting Options' 25-year history of focusing on criminal justice programs in the county court system since 1997 and in the state prisons system since an initial pilot [program at San Quentin in 2008.

One of the guiding principles of Options has always been, whatever you are doing, if you discover a need, fill it. That is what brought Dr. Davida Coady to the Berkeley Judges in 1997. As an emergency room doctor at Oakland's Children's Hospital, she saw abused or injured children coming in to the ER who had been injured or neglected by their adult caretakers, many of whom were addicted to drugs or alcohol. She saw the need, if you address the addiction in the adults, you will improve the lives of the children, where better to have an impact on this population than in the criminal courts where treatment is seldom an option.

The Judges jumped at the opportunity to break the cycle of substance use disorder defendants coming into their courts. Dr. Coady began by interviewing defendants in the Berkeley misdemeanor court and making recommendations to the judge for release into treatment. She quickly saw that getting people into treatment was difficult because of lack of programs and lack of beds in residential treatment. She saw the need, if you want to get people into treatment, you have to do it as soon as they are released from custody. To fill that need she started a treatment group, meeting five days a week in the basement of the Berkeley Veterans Memorial Building. That was the beginning of Options Recovery Services.

This Newsletter highlights Options' Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) bringing substance abuse programming to the state prisons using inmates trained by Options and certified peer mentors. It is an exciting time for Options, I am proud to have been with Options from the beginning. I have seen Options grow over the years past 25 years to become a nationally respected drug and alcohol treatment program. Thank you, dear friends and supporters, you have helped Options in its efforts to break the cycle of addiction.

— Susan Bookman Koerber

*Chair - Options Fund Development Committee*



## Voices from Options' OMCP Graduates

Since 2017, over 500 inmates have graduated from Options' OMCP in state prisons. Many have been released from custody and come to Options to become certified addiction counselors and support staff. Options now employs 25 OMCP graduates who bring hope and support to over 1,000 Options clients each year. These are comments from a few of Options' OMCP graduates.

"Freedom had often been just a mere word, or title of a book I may have read or a movie I may have watched. But to experience liberation in a place where freedom is said to not exist...wow! That's what "OMCP so willingly gave to me. Freedom while still inside. Then, to earn my physical release, with OMCP propelling me forward with a momentum I had become familiar with...an onward charge of personal enrichment and growth; I began to work for the same company that provided me with the education to become free inside myself, and physically from that place of confinement. My experience here at Options Recovery Services has been one of fulfillment, progress and character development brought on by hands on leadership that money cannot buy!!!"

- George K.L. Smith, *Academy of Hope Manager, OMCP Graduate*

"The OMCP was a dream come true and a life changing experience. Options has been so supportive in my transition back into society. I feel so at home here at Options."

- Kate Kent, *Counselor Intern, OMCP Graduate*

"For me, my experience into the OMCP was the accumulation of years of self-reflection and self-discovery. A better way to put it: My cherry on top! All the years of programming led to the passing of the CADTP/NAADAC (Substance Abuse Counselor Certification Agencies) exam, graduation of the OMCP, and now a fulltime employee at Options Recovery Services within 40 days of exiting prison after 32 years of incarceration. Who would've thought it...? I did."

- Warren Hands, *Counselor Intern, OMCP Graduate*

"OMCP changed my life in every way possible because it gave me the opportunity for personal growth. It gave me the skills, tools, and education to help others as I desired to help others, and it enabled me to parole into a full-time job that supported my needs. Options Recovery Services has continued to do all of the same things for me here in the community."

- Corey Glassman, *CATC-III, Admissions Manager, OMCP Graduate*

"The OMCP at Central California Women's Facility gave me the education to find healing and inner freedom. Working at Options has provided me the opportunity to help and watch others find their healing and freedom. What a joyous blessing and opportunity!"

- Pearl Ortiz, *SUD Counselor, OMCP Graduate*

## Options Recovery Services' In-Prison Program Succeeds

In March 2023, Justin Phillips (LMFT, MAC), Options' Executive Director, traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with members of Congress and congressional committees working on criminal justice issues. He was there to talk about the success of Options' Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP), funded by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and operated by Options in seven of the state prisons. There is great interest in this type of program at the federal level in addressing the problems around substance use and incarceration, and a number of state governments as well have expressed an interest in learning more about the program. At its March 24, 2023 Annual meeting, the Options Board of Directors, realizing the impact of the OMCP program, passed a resolution to direct the Executive Director to explore the possibilities of Options playing a crucial role on the national and state levels to promote the concept, develop best practices and to help bring the innovative program to the federal and state levels.

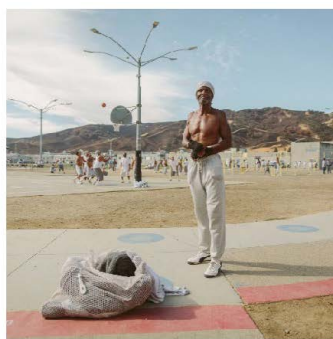


*Moments before walking out of prison after 42 years, OMCP graduate Martin Marsh shares an emotional embrace with Justin Phillips, Executive Director for Options Recovery Services.*

Options' Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) is a voluntary program for long-term and life-term incarcerated individuals. The program consists of two components – an 18 week Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment component where inmates can address their own addictions, and then an intensive, accelerated education and training component where inmates acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become state certified Alcohol and Other Drug counselors. To apply to participate in the OMCP, incarcerated individuals must meet specified criteria, complete and submit an application packet to their institution, and participate in an interview process. To graduate, participants must complete approximately one year of education in Substance Use Disorder Treatment (350 hours of education and a minimum of 255 practicum hours) and pass the Alcohol and Other Drug exam.

At the completion of training and required 2,080 internship hours, OMCP mentors can earn milestone credit, educational merit credit, and obtain certification from a certifying organization recognized by the California Department of Health Care Services. This certification can be used to obtain employment upon release, thereby facilitating the incarcerated individuals successful transition into the community. Options' Traveling Clinical Supervisors support the mentors with continuing education and professional development as they continue careers as helping professionals.

Options first contracted with the state prisons system to provide the program at California State Prison, Solano County, in 2014, graduating 50 inmates with Offender Mentor certification. Brenton Gieser's remarkable documentary "The 50" feature-length documentary shows how a group so underestimated became agents of radical change and the first men to become California certified counselors while inmates of that state's prison system. (<https://www.the50film.com>) "At a time when the California State Prison system was dangerously overcrowded, and more than 85% of its inmates were involved in drug use, one unlikely program looked inward for the answer and took a chance on 50 men serving life inside." Options was able to provide the program at less than half the cost of previous programs at Solano, and the percentage of participants who succeeded in the program drastically improved. The California Department of Corrections Implementation Fidelity Assessment Final Report further documented the success of the program, and concluded that "Options' staff displayed warmth, empathy and sensitivity towards participants" as a key factor in success.



*Look for the film The 50 highlighting OMCP's first graduates at film festivals and theaters soon (<https://www.the50film.com/>).*

Upon graduating from the OMCP, these OMCP mentors are assigned and paid as co-facilitators in Cognitive Behavioral Interventions programs throughout all California adult institutions, providing guidance and peer-to-peer support to incarcerated individuals throughout the state. In the last year, over 140 individuals took the exam with a 97% passing rate. Currently there are over 120 inmates enrolled in Options' OMCP education and training programs in six California prisons, with approximately 200 OMCP graduates providing services while assigned to prisons throughout the state as registered interns and certified counselors. In addition, in the last five years over 180

OMCP graduates have been released from prison and many of these graduates are providing services in addiction recovery programs outside of prison. None of these individuals have obtained their licenses as addiction counselors, have paroled, and are now providing counseling services at Options' sites in Berkeley, Concord, Oakland and San Leandro.



You're invited to help us celebrate our Options' Graduates at the



**June 2nd, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.**

We will have a live broadcast via Facebook and Options' website!

## Please consider supporting Options:

### Write a check or donate on-line

Send a check to Options Recovery Services, donate one time or become a recurring donor on-line at [www.optionsrecovery.org](http://www.optionsrecovery.org). For questions, contact Porter Sexton, Development Director 408-393-0089 or email [psexton@optionsrecovery.org](mailto:psexton@optionsrecovery.org).

Approximately 90% of Options' funding comes from government contracts. The remaining 10% comes from business income and from donations from people like you. Your donations help to provide the necessities that support our clients on their roads to recovery.

### Donate gently used furnishings, appliances, & housing items

Bring items to Options' Allston Way office on Friday afternoons or contact Barbara Madeiros, Housing Director, 510-666-9552 x 123 or email [bmadeiros@optionsrecovery.org](mailto:bmadeiros@optionsrecovery.org).

### Volunteer your time

Help with our office support, development, and/or facility maintenance and improvement. Contact Dianna Beamon, Administration, 510-666-9552 x 119 or email [dbeamon@optionsrecovery.org](mailto:dbeamon@optionsrecovery.org).

### Sponsor a graduation ceremony

A great way to promote your church, business or community organization. Porter Sexton, Development Director, 510-666-9552 X129 or email [psexton@optionsrecovery.org](mailto:psexton@optionsrecovery.org).

### Contract for drug testing services

Ensure your workplace or activity is drug-free by calling Kim Chavez, Director of Administration 510-519-6880 or email [kchavez@optionsrecovery.org](mailto:kchavez@optionsrecovery.org).

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