THE FOUNTAIN FUND

BOSTON SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

CLIENT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT – STEPHEN PINA

It's one o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon when the interview with **Stephen Pina** gets underway. He's halfway between a morning meeting, lunch and a panel discussion that is set to start within the hour. We video chat for twenty minutes in his car, before he asks if there's any chance we can walk and talk.

"Of course," I reply. In this short time together, one thing is abundantly clear… as a reentry advocate, Stephen's commitment is absolute, his resolve unwavering. And the hat he wears says it all, he is ***never not working***.

Stephen Pina, Community Engagement Associate with the Exoneree Network, moves through the world with a Herculean heart.

What drives his urgency and determination? Stephen spent nearly three decades in prison for a murder that he didn't commit. In 2022, new evidence resulted in his release. Just recently, after two years, eleven months and three days, Stephen says with relief, "The judge overturned my conviction and vacated the sentence." At long last, Stephen is fully exonerated.

"Since I've been home," Stephen shares, "I advocate heavy. I take any opportunity I can to help someone get out of a wrongful conviction. I believe it's a hidden epidemic that needs to be recognized in the same way as the opioid crisis." He continues, "I also show up in spaces to talk about post-incarceration trauma, post-incarceration syndrome and the mental health issues that result from time behind bars."

The ability to easily and reliably get around town is pivotal to Stephen's advocacy and outreach efforts. So, when his vehicle started to falter, he wasn't quite sure where to turn. His car was given to him as a gift from a friend when he was released, and as such, it holds sentimental value. Stephen knew about the Fountain Fund through his work in the reentry sphere, so he decided to reach out and explore options. Within no time, a $5,900 auto repair loan had been approved, and he was able to get his car back on the road! He made his first payment in February 2025 and is excited about the chance to watch his credit grow while continuing his lifechanging work.

NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS – SHARING THE STAGE WITH BRYAN STEVENSON

Martize Tolbert, Bryan Stevenson and Erika Viccellio

On Friday, April 11, our agency was honored to share the stage at Monticello with criminal justice icon **Bryan Stevenson**. Guests gathered on the West Lawn to celebrate Founder's Day and award Stevenson with the **2025 Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Citizen Leadership**. The ceremony also included the presentation of the **2025 Citizen Service Award** to **Martize Tolbert** on behalf of The Fountain Fund.

Stevenson is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned. Through a powerful keynote address, he reminded listeners of Jefferson's deeply held belief that honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom. He eloquently shared, "We deny ourselves the beauty of justice when we refuse to tell the truth." And he thoughtfully encouraged, "We can all be citizen leaders by committing to being truthtellers, even when it's inconvenient, even when it's uncomfortable." He continued, "I believe there is something better waiting for us. Something that feels more like freedom."

For Stevenson, receiving the award, at this particular moment in time, is a call to action. "A challenge not to sit down, but to stand up. A challenge not to be quiet, but to keep speaking. A challenge to be a truthteller for the kind of just world that we all so desperately need."

PROGRAM PARTNER SPOTLIGHT – INNERCITY WEIGHTLIFTING

InnerCity Weightlifting's mission is to amplify the voice and agency of people who have been most impacted by systemic racism and mass incarceration. As shared on their website, "This is not your typical gym. It's a culture and community in which the power dynamics are flipped, social capital is bridged, and new leaders emerge in the fight to combat longstanding inequities."

Program participants are supported through case management and careers in and beyond personal training. Individuals are elevated as fitness experts and revered for their life wisdom. ICW also helps program participants by connecting them with other reentry organizations! Joe Sierra was recently referred to the Fountain Fund for a tuition loan for his Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training. Today, Joe is on his way to a promising new career.

Client Partner Joe Sierra celebrates his education loan.

TEDxRoxbury

On Saturday, May 3, **Jay Vilar**, Boston Site Director, takes the stage to present:
How Choosing Happiness Can Have Generational Benefits
Shares Jay, "Speaking at TEDx has been one of those big, audacious dreams—the kind that sits on your vision board, waiting for the right moment. And now, that moment is here." Visit TEDxRoxbury to purchase tickets. Let's raise the roof for Jay!

THE PATRIOTS FOUNDATION AND THE FOUNTAIN FUND TEAM UP!

Each quarter, the **Boston Reentry Partners Breakfast** brings together leaders, advocates, and organizations working to support individuals returning from incarceration. Shares Jay Vilar, "The room is always filled with energy, collaboration, and new connections!" He emphasizes, "Reentry is not a solo journey, and neither is the work of supporting it. When we build strong networks between reentry partners, we create a more effective, comprehensive, and sustainable ecosystem for success." Interested in joining a reentry breakfast or becoming involved as a volunteer or donor? Call 617.229.5131, to learn more.

PATRIOTS FOUNDATION
CELEBRATE VOLUNTEERISM

We thank the Patriots Foundation for believing in our mission! Their support makes these quarterly gatherings possible.

BOSTON FACTS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE
95% "Transformed my life for the better."
97% "Feel empowered to overcome barriers in my life."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *I wish more people knew about your low-interest loans. You helped me build credit and keep working.*
- *A lot of places say they want to help this population, but when you get down to applying, they shut you down and block you out. Working with Jay was different. The first thing he wanted to know was my story, and that was beautiful.*

ACTIVE LOAN PORTFOLIO
As of February 28, 2025, Boston's active loan portfolio included 9 loans valued at nearly $25,751.

CONTACT US

JAY VILAR, BOSTON SITE DIRECTOR
1127 Harrison Ave, Suite C
Boston, MA, 02119
617.229.5131
jvilar@fountainfund.org

EXAMPLES OF LOANS

- Business Equipment
- Secure Housing
- Obtain a Driver's License
- Vehicle Repair
- Tuition

GROWING STRONG
We're excited to welcome **Harry Jean-Jaques**, **Community & Client Partner Specialist**, to our Boston team!

Great things are happening at all of our sites! Scan to learn more.