

FORMER INMATE BECOMES MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Century Regional Detention Center Newsletter

June 2015

A former inmate, named Jamina Johnson, was a guest speaker for the female inmates incarcerated at Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF) on Wednesday, June 17. Johnson used the experiences of her life to bring inspiration and hope to the inmates who felt they had none. She shared stories about her life when she was involved in a lifestyle of crime, drugs, and gangs.

Johnson's decline started when she was first incarcerated in April 2008. Despite being raised by two loving, hard-working parents (one of which is a preacher), she decided to pave her way down a dark path that lead her into a lifestyle of drugs and crime. She was first incarcerated at CRDF for a robbery case, then later sentenced to two years in state prison. In 2010, she returned a second time for a parole violation. Her third visit to CRDF occurred on October 2012 and it became a 17-month sentence which she felt was the turning point in her life.

Johnson states, "It all began on my birthday in October 2012. I was getting high with people... and the next thing I knew, I began running down the street naked and high on PCP." When asked about the total experience she said, "Every day is now new, and I'm imperfectly perfect. If it weren't for this arrest, I might be dead."

During her stay at CRDF, she finally admitted to herself that her lifestyle had spiraled out of control. She hit rock bottom. She wanted to change her lifestyle, but she didn't know how. She made the decision to leave this lifestyle despite the challenges.

Johnson participated in the Education Based Incarceration (EBI) Merit dorm at CRDF and understood that it would take hard work and determination to change. While in EBI, the staff modeled and taught the importance of time management and good work ethics. The EBI program uses a comprehensive educational curriculum, consisting of both traditional and nontraditional educational opportunities, designed to reduce recidivism by increasing the educational, civic, social, economic, and life skills and engagement of its participants.

Johnson states that she was given the option to graduate with certificates in culinary arts, painting, fashion, and possibly even earn a GED; if these were things that interested her. This is exactly what Johnson did, she graduated.

Now she's back in jail, but this time, Johnson came back to inspire others. Johnson was able to grab the attention of every inmate in attendance. The inmates were in a total trance and were able to relate to her since she was recently incarcerated and accomplished so much in a short period of time. One inmate asked, "How did you feel while you were here?" Johnson said, "I felt like I was trying to get to the second story with no stairs, but the staff and EBI program were my stairs that helped get me to the next step." She continued and said, "Be a sponge and absorb it all because you never miss the water until the well runs dry, and I was thirsty!" she exclaimed. Many inmates nodded their heads in agreement and raised their hands to rejoice as if the words lifted them off the chairs and into the life they imagined for themselves.

"I feel I am not alone, even though I am a felon, I can accomplish something in life. I now have hope," said one inmate after listening to Johnson. Another inmate asked Johnson, "What has kept you out of jail?" Johnson replied, "Fear."

Once Johnson's words settled in the minds of the inmates, Captain Maria Gutierrez reinforced them by saying, "It's time to start living! Take off those negative labels and choose to wear positive ones. Be courageous and take the opportunities here to invest in yourself!" All that could be heard were applause, shouts of joy, and words of encouragement.

For more information, please contact Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Written by Deputy Arroyo and Officer Estelle.



EBI STAFF: Deputy Ponce, Officer Harris, Jamina Johnson, Officer Veal and Senior Sherman.



Jamina Johnson speaking to the inmates at CRDF.