Unlocking the Future: Life After Incarceration, a conversation at Washington State History Museum on Saturday, March 2

Tacoma, WA – This Saturday afternoon the Washington State History Museum presents a unique opportunity to hear from formerly incarcerated people speaking to the challenges and opportunities of re-entry, and the crucial importance of education, after being released from prison. Hear from panelists who have re-entered society and are succeeding personally while benefitting others at the “Unlocking the Future” symposium from 1:00-3:30 PM, March 2.

Omari Amili, panel moderator, went from serving time on felony charges to earning a master’s degree at University of Washington Tacoma. Today, he is a community leader, working to help others face the challenges of life after incarceration. Amili is also a published author and a 2019 Humanities Washington speaker, presenting “From Crime to the Classroom: How Education Changes Lives.”

Discussion panelists include Dr. Christopher Beasley, Christopher Johnston, Tarra Simmons, Department of Corrections Secretary Stephen Sinclair, and Shaun Worthy.

Simmons’ name may be familiar from press coverage during her post-law school battle to take the bar. The Washington State Bar Association initially denied her application. The case went to the Washington Supreme Court and was quickly resolved in Simmons’ favor. Formerly incarcerated, Simmons is now an attorney; the executive director of Civil Survival; and a Governor Appointee to the Public Defense Advisory Board and the Statewide Reentry Council where she serves as co-chair.

Shaun Worthy is a native Tacoman who grew up in difficult circumstances, was incarcerated, and now is a single-custody father, author, TED speaker, coach, and founder of Worthy Hustle Apparel Company. The introduction on Worthy’s LinkedIn bio summarizes his mission: “I help transform 'Hard Kids' ages 12-18, into productive leaders in society, no matter what struggles they may face.”
Christopher Johnston’s youth included many challenges and ultimately time in the correctional system for a crime he didn’t commit. With the support of his family and opportunities provided at UW Tacoma, he enrolled as a first generation student at University of Washington Tacoma. Johnston received the University of Washington 2017 Dean’s Leadership Award, Husky Volunteer Award, and Gift of Service Award. Today he is a South Seattle College instructor, poet, singer and parent.

Stephen Sinclair is the Secretary of the Washington State Department of Corrections, and an advocate for prison reform and sustainability. Sinclair’s career at DOC began over 30 years ago. He pioneered the Sustainability in Prisons Project, which employs incarcerated individuals in jobs that reduce the cost of facility operations, provides meaningful vocational work and skills training, and allows incarcerated people the opportunity to give back to the community.

Dr. Christopher Beasley is a community organizer, psychologist, and professor at University of Washington Tacoma. Dr. Beasley co-founded the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network – a national organization of people with college degrees who have been to prison. The organization’s mission is to promote the education and empowerment of formerly incarcerated people through a collective community. Beasley directs the UWT Post-Prison Education Research Lab.

Following the discussion panel, guests and panelists can talk further over refreshments and see the History Museum’s exhibition Unlocking McNeil’s Past: The Prison, The Place, The People with museum staff available to answer questions. The exhibition presents the island’s history through accounts from prison staff, people formerly incarcerated there, and residents of the island. It describes McNeil’s connections to significant state and national events, delves into the island’s early settlement, and tells the story of the unique relationship between the prison and its island community.

"Unlocking the Future" is this Saturday, March 2, 1:00-3:30, at the Washington State History Museum. The symposium is free with museum admission.

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Image Credit: Omari Amili, image courtesy University of Washington Tacoma.

Washington State Historical Society partners with our communities to explore how history connects us all. The Society’s most visible activity, the Washington State History Museum (WSHM) is located in Tacoma's downtown core along Pacific Avenue among a thriving cultural scene. The museum features interactive permanent exhibitions about Washington’s past in the Great Hall, unique rotating exhibitions highlighting the Society’s collections, and dynamic feature exhibitions.

Address: 1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402
Hours: 10:00AM–5:00PM Tuesday through Sunday. Third Thursday of each month, 10:00AM–8:00PM.
Admission: Free for members; Adults $14; seniors (age 65+), students (age 6-17) and military (with ID) $11; free for children 5 and under; family rate $40 (up to two adults and four children under age 18). Patrons with a Washington Quest card and licensed Washington Foster Parents can attend for $1 per person or $2 per family.