



Graduates pose for a photo during the Connection and Intervention Station reentry program fall graduation celebration on Thursday in Nampa.

Brian Myrick / Idaho Press



Evette Navedo speaks during the Connection and Intervention Station reentry program fall graduation celebration on Thursday in Nampa.

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Previous offenders take a step forward with Nampa-Caldwell reentry program

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NAMPA — Graduates arrived in blue caps and gowns for the Nampa-Caldwell Connection and Intervention Station reentry graduation. Thursday afternoon's celebration marked nine months of progress and growth for previously incarcerated individuals.

The room was filled with chatter and laughs, with advisors not just fulfilling their title, but also acting as supporters and friends.

The fall graduation was for participants who completed the nine-month CIS reentry program, aimed at reducing criminal behavior.

Differing from other programs, CIS isn't meant to be one size fits all, District 3 Probation and Parole Manager Cory Barrier explained.

"It's good to have a variety to apply to the right person," Barrier said. "Every individual is different and unique."

Entering the program, participants take an assessment to see where they are with housing, employment and their relation with substances. Utilizing these results, participants receive individualized plans to improve behavior and identify criminogenic risks.

"The more options and resources we have available to connect people to, the better off the community is," Barrier

said. "It may not be public safety in the traditional sense ... but when clients are making better choices in the community, we're all safer as a result. So it's a rehabilitative kind of approach to public safety."

Previous graduate Jeff Cheney recalled coming into the program with a less-than-positive attitude.

"My first impressions were, 'Oh, no, not another program,'" Cheney recalled.

Despite his negative outlook, the staff was overwhelmingly positive. Even when he failed to make progress, the team was there to applaud small changes.

Eventually, Cheney passed his first drug test in decades. He recalled high-fiving Alan Gergin, the supervising case manager who had been a great support.

"That was kind of a stepping stone," he said.

Without the program, Cheney believes he would be back in prison instead.

"This is the only program I've ever done that's ever helped me," he said.

Many other graduates shared a similar sentiment.

Graduate Kat Hale said that what you put into the program, you get out.



She said there is a level of trust between participants and the staff, where she had to understand that the team wanted the best for her.

"You build bonds with these people," Hale said. "It's not just something that's surface level at the end of the day."

Rather than a mandated system keeping tabs on them, the program is voluntary for those reentering society.

Hale had gone through two other programs before, but they were required. As cookie cutter courses, there wasn't a need to prove herself.

Instead at CIS, she had to show that she was making progress, motivating her to do the hard things.

"Take the jump," Hale said. "You will not know how extraordinary your life will turn out if you don't take the jump."



She plans to pursue her interest in dog grooming, with hopes to one day own her own business.

Over a span of three years, the Idaho Department of Correction saw 46% of offenders return to prison, according to a GEO Reentry Services report

Comparatively, the program saw 23% of its participants re-offend.

"Our focus with probation or parole is really, how do we set people up to be successful and assimilate back into the community with their families?" Barrier said.

The graduation was a monumental event for some, taking steps toward better navigating the real world.

"We can't just try once and then give up," Barrier said, speaking to the crowd.

It wasn't an end, but a milestone on each of their journeys.

"It doesn't stop here," Statewide Manager Evette Navedo said. "The change that you want to see is the constant thing you have to be intentional about."

Mentors spoke about each of the nearly 20 graduates as they walked to receive their certificates and asked them questions about their journey.



"I learned to cope with day-to-day struggles," graduate Teresalee Roundy-Stolle said.

Program alumni Ben Rodgers spoke on his own experience in the program and maintaining progress after. Rodgers spent most of his adult life in and out of prison.

It wasn't easy, but with the help of the program, he learned to be patient with himself and set small, achievable goals.

"Some days, it's as simple as just making it to work," Rodgers said.

The graduates reiterated that the support they received was crucial to their growth.

"I wasn't put there just for the fun of it," program graduate Brandon Welcome said. "I was put there because someone saw something from me."

At the end of the ceremony, the graduates threw their caps in the air, as the crowd of family and friends cheered.