

Education for Mind and Heart

30th Anniversary Celebration 2025

RIISING HOPE'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Union Theological Seminary
October 4, 2025 - 5:00 - 8:00 pm

Reception
Music by Larry Figueroa

Welcome
Dario Peña '06, Board Vice President

DINNER

PROGRAM

Opening Remarks
Kimberly Malone, Board President

Special Remarks
Deputy Commissioner Joseph Joseph, DOCCS

Video Presentation
Produced by Blair Nascimento '10

HONOREES

The 2025 Bill Webber Service Awards
Rye Presbyterian Church
Ernest Henry '99
Hans Hallundbaek
Anderson Davis

The 2025 Alumni Awards
Samuel "Khnmue" Hamilton '98
John "Divine G" Whitfield '02
Dr. Ronald Day '05
Darren Ferguson '96

Message from the President

Thirty years ago, Rising Hope was born out of both crisis and vision. When public funding for college in prison was eliminated in 1995, a group of graduates from the master's program inside Sing Sing Correctional Facility — together with visionary volunteers — saw an opportunity to act. Together, they created a rigorous, year-long certificate program that invited students to engage in deep academic study and self-reflection.

From the very beginning, Rising Hope has been a labor of love powered by passionate volunteers — both inside and outside the prison walls. Over the last three decades, hundreds of volunteer faculty have offered thousands of classes, at one point reaching seven correctional facilities across New York State. More than 1,300 students have graduated from the program, forming learning communities that encourage accountability, foster transformation, and spark a lifelong commitment to scholarship and service. Many have gone on to advanced degrees, leadership, and advocacy — inspiring others through their example.

In recent years, new challenges have reshaped prison education, yet Rising Hope continues to meet them with creativity and commitment. Looking forward, we are returning to our roots: building communities of accountability and transformation. We are developing a fellowship program to provide stipends for Rising Hope alumni to return inside as instructors for the next generation of students. We hope you will join us in this pursuit.

Rising Hope has always been more than a program — it is a launchpad for possibility. As we celebrate 30 years, we honor the legacy of those who built this work and look forward with hope and determination.

With gratitude,

Kimberly Malone
President, Rising Hope, Inc



Message from the Commissioner

I am proud to support programs that provide life-changing services to our population, helping them build the skills and relationships needed for a successful return to their communities. Strong connections and opportunities for growth are at the heart of successful reentry, and we are deeply grateful for partners who make this possible.

Congratulations to Rising Hope on 30 years of dedicated service! We are sincerely thankful for the vital role you play in advancing DOCCS' mission to enhance public safety by ensuring meaningful, appropriate services in safe and secure facilities. With more than 1,300 alumni, your legacy of transformation is clear, but know that you have also impacted the lives of countless people in your assistance in breaking cycles of incarceration, a statistic that can never be measured.

As the Department continues to rebuild and move forward, we draw inspiration from your commitment and are encouraged by the difference you make every day. We look with hope to the future, knowing your work will continue to provide students with the opportunity to learn, grow, and become the very best version of themselves.

With gratitude, thank you for all you do.

Daniel Martuscello III
Commissioner
New York State Department of Corrections
and Community Service



RISEING HOPE

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

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RIISING HOPE
30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

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From the Family of Bill Webber

Bill Webber was a believer - in the importance of faith, education, and most importantly, in the innate potential of others. For Bill, faith was not just about a guiding text, or even a higher power, but about building and strengthening relationships with others, and with oneself as well.

All of those beliefs come together in the work of Rising Hope.

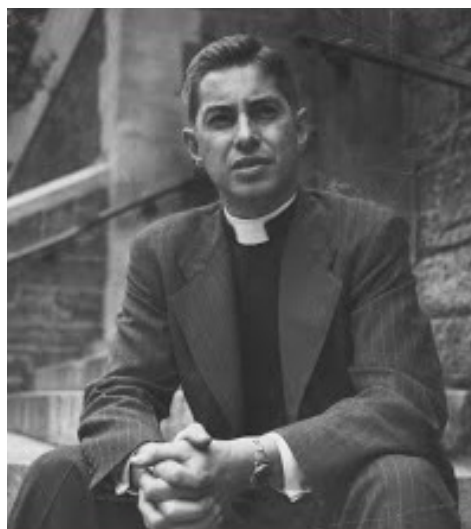
When Bill stepped up to lead New York Theological Seminary nearly 60 years ago, he was excited by the opportunity to share with others - students of theology, faith leaders, and New Yorkers more broadly - his vision for urban ministry and spiritual development that saw beyond the four walls of a classroom or a chapel.

Over time, that vision seeded the creation of what is known as the Master of Professional Studies (MPS) in Ministry and Leadership for incarcerated students, now hosted at Union Theological Seminary. The opportunity to expand the reach of what was sometimes referred to as the “prison program” was something Bill welcomed and the creation of Rising Hope in 1995 allowed for just that - extending the community of learners and future leaders even further.

As a minister who saw the Bible as a guide, rather than a rule, Bill returned many times to a passage in Jeremiah 29:7 -- “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Bill would be deeply moved to know how the Rising Hope fellowship of leaders serving “the welfare of the city” has only grown over time. And it would give Bill great joy to see the continuing work of Rising Hope and the accomplishments of its many students, graduates, and volunteers.

Congratulations to the Rising Hope community. And to 30 more years of good work.



CIVIL RIGHTS—SUMMER 1963



shown above being carried from the site of the Downstate Medical Center where he was demonstrating for equal employment opportunity this last summer is the Rev. George F. Webber, '48. (The special insert in this issue is devoted entirely to the involvement of our Student Body, Faculty, Board of Directors and Alumni in the civil rights struggle.

Rising Hope 30th Anniversary Honorees

THE 2025 BILL WEBBER SERVICE AWARDS

Rev. Dr. Hans Hallundbaek

Rev. Dr. Hans Hallundbaek taught students in the very first Rising Hope cohort 30 years ago. He is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and co-founder of both Rehabilitation Through the Arts and the Interfaith Prison Partnership (IPP). He has served as an adjunct instructor at John Jay College and Marist College, bringing his expertise in faith, social justice, and criminal justice education to students and incarcerated individuals alike.

Through decades of service, Dr. Hallundbaek has advanced prison ministry, reentry support, and interfaith collaboration, creating programs that uplift communities and foster lasting transformation. His work exemplifies Rising Hope's mission to empower individuals through education, accountability, and hope.

Ernest Henry '99

Ernest Henry is an alumnus of the Rising Hope program and went on to teach and serve on the Rising Hope board. He is a community leader, business owner, and educator dedicated to serving and uplifting the Poughkeepsie community. He has hosted the radio program Voices Beyond the Wall for seventeen years, taught at Marist College, and led initiatives connecting youth to education, employment, and support services.

A recipient of the 2023 Northern Dutchess NAACP "Man of Distinction" Award and recognized by the City of Poughkeepsie and New York State Assembly for his community activism, Ernest's work embodies Rising Hope's mission to foster growth, accountability, and opportunity for all.

Rye Presbyterian Church

Rye Presbyterian Church has been a dedicated supporter of Rising Hope since its inception. With a long history of mission and outreach, the church focuses on serving those most in need, including through education, restorative justice, and prison ministry programs.

Through its members' active engagement and grant-making initiatives, Rye Presbyterian Church strengthens community connections, promotes justice, and fosters personal and spiritual growth. Their enduring support has been integral to Rising Hope's ability to transform lives and provide educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals.

Anderson Davis II '17

Anderson Davis has served as the Rising Hope Program Assistant at Sing Sing since he completed the program in 2017, supporting the administration and delivery of educational programming for incarcerated students. He earned an associate's degree and a Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science from Mercy University, and he is currently enrolled in the Master of Professional Studies in Ministry and Leadership program at Union Theological Seminary.

In addition to his academic achievements, Anderson has earned multiple New York State technical certifications and is an accomplished musician, performing with Carnegie Hall's *Musical Connections* and *Musicambia*. His commitment to education, creativity, and service empowers students to grow academically, spiritually, and socially—embodying Rising Hope's mission to awaken potential and foster transformation inside and beyond prison walls.

The 2025 ALUMNI EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Dr. Ronald F. Day ‘05– Excellence in Academics

Ronald F. Day, Ph.D., serves as Chief Operating Officer of The Fortune Society, where he provides strategic oversight of operations and advances initiatives in research, policy, and social justice. He earned a Master’s in Public Administration from Baruch College (CUNY) and a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from the CUNY Graduate Center/John Jay College.

Throughout his career, Dr. Day has worked to dismantle mass incarceration, reduce stigma, and promote successful reentry, leading efforts in advocacy, evaluation, and innovation that improve both public safety and community well-being. Recognized with numerous awards for his leadership, he exemplifies Rising Hope’s mission to awaken potential and foster meaningful change through education, accountability, and hope.

Samuel “Khnmue” Hamilton ‘98 – Excellence in Advocacy

Samuel Hamilton is a re-entry advocate and board member for The Fortune Society, where he supports formerly incarcerated individuals in rebuilding their lives. He has served as a Senior Re-Entry Advocate at Brooklyn Defender Services and previously worked with Housing Works and Hudson Link/Nyack College.

A graduate of New York Theological Seminary, Samuel draws on his lived experience and professional expertise to empower others, promote justice, and create pathways for transformation, embodying Rising Hope’s mission to awaken potential and foster meaningful change.

John “Divine G” Whitfield ‘02 – Excellence in the Arts

John “Divine G” Whitfield is a playwright, author, and former resident at Sing Sing, where he co-founded the Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) program. During his nearly 25 years of incarceration, he wrote plays and novels, using art for personal transformation and advocacy.

His life story inspired the 2023 film Sing Sing, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for co-writing the screenplay. He also served as executive producer and made a cameo appearance.

Today, he continues to create and publish work while advocating for justice and exoneration, exemplifying Rising Hope’s mission to awaken potential and empower individuals to impact their communities through talent and resilience.

Bishop Darren A. Ferguson ‘96 – Excellence in Ministry

Bishop Darren A. Ferguson is a preacher, teacher, author, and social activist whose ministry spans pulpits, prisons, and public policy. He earned both Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from New York Theological Seminary. He currently serves as Pastor-Elect of Macedonia Baptist Church in Harlem and as Director of the Liberty Avenue Men’s Shelter in Brooklyn.

Bishop Ferguson has led reentry and youth initiatives with The Osborne Association, Graham Windham, The Interfaith Center of New York, and the National Action Network, and teaches theology and justice courses at Sing Sing and Bedford Hills for Union Theological Seminary. A published author and founding minister of the Hip Hop Church, he embodies the transformative power of education and faith, reflecting Rising Hope’s mission to awaken potential and guide lives toward healing, leadership, and liberation.

30 Years of Rising Hope: Education that Transforms Lives

Celebrating three decades of awakening potential, equipping leaders,
and building communities of peace and service —
inside and beyond prison walls.

Mission Statement

Rising Hope provides educational programs for people in New York correctional facilities to awaken their potential to grow intellectually, psychologically, spiritually, morally, socially, and vocationally — equipping them to work for the good of themselves, their families, and their communities wherever their lives may take them.

Why We Began

When college programs were defunded in New York prisons in the 1990s, access to higher education nearly disappeared. Rising Hope was created to fill that gap and to offer incarcerated people the chance to grow, to heal, and to prepare for a meaningful life of service and leadership.

We believe that education is a lifeline — one that transforms individuals and builds safer, stronger communities both inside and outside prison walls.

Brief History

Founded in 1995 in response to the elimination of state and federal funding for incarcerated students, Rising Hope (which began as the Certificate in Ministry and Human Services program, “CMHS”) was created at Sing Sing by a group of incarcerated scholars with the support of Rev. Dr. George “Bill” Webber, then President of New York Theological Seminary, and other committed volunteers.

In 2003, the program became Rising Hope, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and it expanded to serve at its peak seven correctional facilities across New York State, impacting the lives of more than 1,300 alumni.

What We Do & How We Work

Rising Hope provides rigorous, college-level courses in ministry and human services at New York correctional facilities at no cost to students.

How We Work:

- **Challenging Curriculum:** Students complete 8–10 courses over two 15-week semesters, earning the Rising Hope Certificate.
- **Volunteer-Powered Model:** Our faculty includes professors, clergy, counselors, retired educators, and qualified incarcerated graduates, all teaching as volunteers.
- **Supportive Learning Communities:** Students study human behavior, ethics, writing, and theology from a scholarly perspective, fostering intellectual growth, personal responsibility, and respect for all faith traditions.

Accessible & Inclusive: Open to people of all (or no) faith traditions, welcoming diversity of thought and life experience.

Highlights of 30 Years of Rising Hope:

- *1,300 alumni* have completed the Rising Hope Certificate Program, almost 2000 have participated in Rising Hope classes and workshops.
- *Seven New York State correctional facilities* served since 1995; currently we are operating at Sing Sing, Fishkill, and Woodbourne.
- *Thousands of volunteer-taught classes* delivered over three decades — a 100% volunteer-powered organization.
- *College credit opportunities* available through SUNY and NCCRS review, helping students progress toward associate's, bachelor's, and even advanced degrees (some alumni have gone on to graduate from Ph.D. programs!).
- *Low-cost, high-impact model:* An annual budget of \$25,000 funds books, supplies, alumni events, academic review — maximizing every dollar raised.
- *Proven ripple effect:* Students leave with intellectual skills, spiritual grounding, and leadership abilities that positively impact their families and communities.

Art Project by Rising Hope Students and Alumni

This “multi-vocal” painting was created by students at Taconic, Fishkill, and Sing Sing Correctional Facilities, as well as alumni of Rising Hope.

To facilitate its creation, I first worked with students at Taconic to choose the theme. In a brainstorming process, students talked about how they wanted the content of the piece to be about the experience of being incarcerated. They came up with many different ideas and many different types of images, but the one that resonated most deeply with the whole group was an image of light at the end of a tunnel.

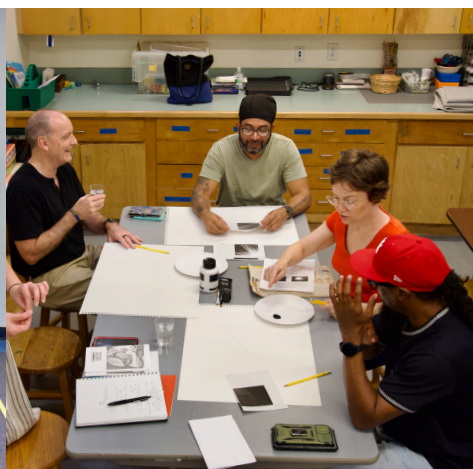
Students spoke about how the image is a metaphor, with the dark of the tunnel representing the struggle of living in prison, and the light at the end representing all that they hope for themselves, all that they aim to become, all that they dream of doing and achieving on the other side. These students at Taconic, a women’s designated facility, noted that Rising Hope does not currently offer programming there, but that it is very much desired.

After they selected the image, I divided it into a grid, and students at Fishkill and Sing Sing painted individual tiles for the image. Alumni of Rising Hope on the outside painted tiles too, so that this final artwork becomes a symbolic bridge between the inside and out.

- Mollie Hosmer-Dillard, artist and advocate
www.molliehd.com, www.artsandjusticelab.com

Contributing Artists:

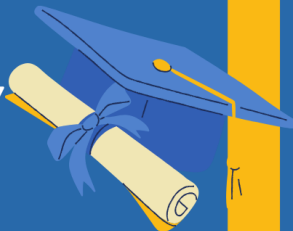
Taconic: K.B., M.D., A.E., T.E., J.F., S.G., M.H., R. H., A.H., J.M., A.M., R.N., K.P., S.P., A.P., J. R., S.S.,
Fishkill: S.A., C.C, M.J., Y.M.,
Alumni: J.B., C.A., P.C., C.M.,
Sing Sing: W.D., E.E., A.D., J.K., R.L., O.W., R.R., C.H., A.P., K.W., J.W., T.S., A.Z., C.D.





COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
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**ON 30 YEARS
OF RISING HOPE
GRADUATES!**

INCLUDING MANY OF OUR
JUSTICE-IN-EDUCATION
STUDENTS AND RISING HOPE
BOARD MEMBER DARIO PEÑA!

*Scan the QR code to learn
more about our work:*





Church of the Heavenly
Rest is thrilled to celebrate
Rising Hope and all of the
wonderful work they've
done for the past 30 years!
Our congregation is excited
to partner with Rising
Hope as they continue to
transform lives through the
power of education.

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UNLOCKING THEIR FUTURES

HudsonLinkempowers currently andformerly incarceratedpeople to realizetheiracademicand economicpotential by managing degree-granting college programs and providing essential reentry support. Established in 1998, Hudson Link has had a profound impact on the lives of countless incarcerated people, empowering them to create positive change for themselves.



OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE:



2,000+
Alumni Released
from Prison



1,300+
Degrees
Awarded



Transitional
Housing
(New
Beginnings)



500+
Students Enrolled
Currently

LEARN MORE

Discover the transformative work of Hudson Link by visiting our website. Simply scan the QR code here to learn more about our mission and impact.



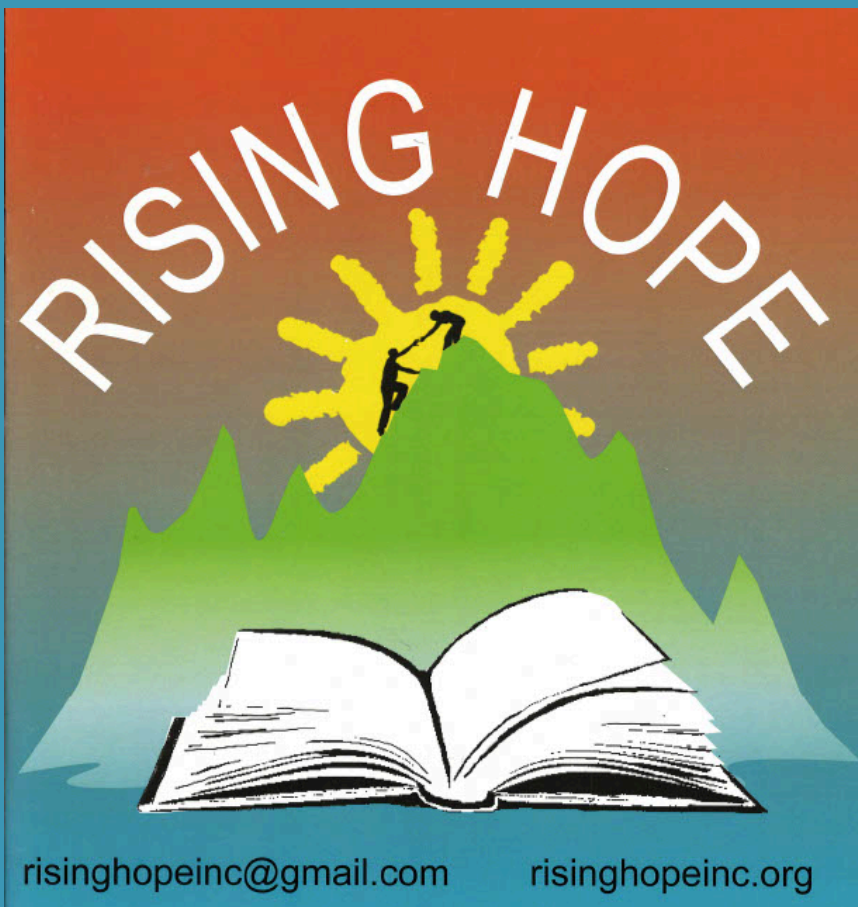
RTA proudly congratulates **Rising Hope**
on 30 years of transformative impact
within the carceral system.

Your unwavering commitment to and
belief in higher education have changed
countless lives behind prison walls.

We are honored to stand beside you as
partners in reshaping justice and
empowering incarcerated individuals
across New York State.

Together, we are not only stronger — we
are agents of meaningful, lasting change.





To Rising Hope grads: I am edified by what all of you have done with your lives since your Rising Hope experience.

To MPS grads: I am deeply grateful for your efforts to recruit, mentor, and teach Rising Hope students and administer Rising Hope programs.

To all civilian faculty and volunteers: Thank you so much for your participation. You may never know the full impact of your work on Rising Hope students, and I'm sure it's had an impact on you too.

May the program continue to flourish and endure!

Katherine Meeks

**CONGRATULATIONS TO
THE MPS ALUMNI & OTHER
LEADERS ON RISING
HOPE'S 30 YEARS OF
IMPACT!**

UNION

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



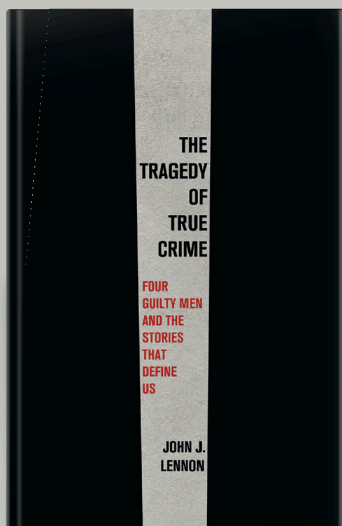
Union congratulates the MPS Alumni and many other leaders on Rising Hope's 30 Years of Impact, showcasing dedication and visionary leadership as they transform lives and create communities committed to positive change.

A VIVID, INTIMATE ACCOUNT THAT CUTS THROUGH THE SENSATIONALISM AND REVEALS THE HUMANITY BEHIND BARS

"With compassion, nuance, and relentless honesty, John J. Lennon explores why people commit violent crime and how prison harms us all. The result is simply astonishing: a profound, brave account that I couldn't put down."

—JAMES FORMAN, JR.

Professor at Yale Law and Pulitzer Prize-winning
author of *Locking Up Our Own*



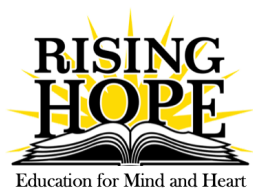
LEARN MORE:



The Tragedy of True Crime
by John J. Lennon is available now
everywhere books are sold

FROM THE AUTHOR, JOHN J. LENNON, WHO IS
CURRENTLY INCARCERATED AT SING SING:

"Two of the men I profile in my new book, The Tragedy of True Crime, received master's degrees from programs supported by Rising Hope. Their stories speak to the transformative power of education behind bars, and I hope they will inspire you to support Rising Hope's mission as they celebrate their 30th anniversary."



James Chapel
October 4, 2025



Thank You to our Sponsors!



*The Family of
Bill and Dibby
Webber*



**Posner-Wallace
Foundation**



The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS



Rye
Presbyterian
Church



THE
**PETEY
GREENE**
PROGRAM

UNION

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Rising Hope would like to thank Serbio at Piropo Flowers for the lovely table arrangements for tonight's celebration.

Piropo Flowers mission is spreading loving relationships between people. Enhancing the power of flowers in every life.

www.piropoflowers.com

**The Interfaith Assembly is proud
to recognize and celebrate
30 years of changing lives**



INTERFAITH ASSEMBLY on
HOMELESSNESS
AND HOUSING

The legacy of Bill Webber lives on through your holy work. The Interfaith Assembly is very grateful to all whose faith and commitment continue to make it possible.

Without hope, all is lost

Cover Art by Bori Hector Rodriguez

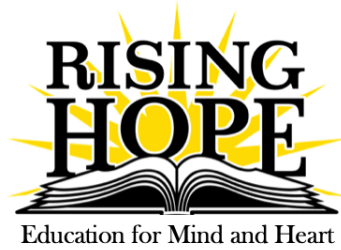
We asked one of our Rising Hope alumni, Hector “Bori” Rodriguez ‘11, an amazing artist to design our program cover. Bori was inspired by the following quote from one of our alumni:

“Participating in the Program in Ministry and Human Services has been an enlightening experience that I do not think I would have found anywhere else. It was a gift of sight, for metaphorically I was living in the land of the blind. It caused me to look inside of myself and examine my own sense of forgiveness, culpability and accountability for my actions past and present. This process of self-examination caused me to change my outlook of what is possible. Since graduating from the Program in Ministry and Human Services, I have become a positive part of the fabric of my community here at Sing Sing. I look forward to becoming a productive member of my family, community and society.”

— Rory Anderson ‘00

What stood out to Bori was Rory’s description of the “gift of sight.” As he considered this he took a trip to Letchworth State Park. There he was captivated by the waterfalls and the mountains. He thought about the way that both education and nature have liberated him. He thought about how he is motivated by our life cycles and God’s purpose. These thoughts formed the foundation for his piece on our program cover.





***Thank you for joining us for this special
evening celebrating 30 years of
Rising Hope!***

***Help us continue this important program
for another 30 years!***

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www.risinghopeinc.org

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#RisingHope30***

