
Chris Stokes

Speaker

City of Newark
Water and Sewer Department



Chris Stokes was born in Newark, NJ in 1962. He was been arrested 53 times, has 4 felonies and has been to prison twice. Chris changed his life and reunited with his son, daughter and other family members after an extended absence due to his criminal lifestyle and negative choices.

Chris' current life path is a blessing that all started in 2012 when a young boy, named Sincere, asked him a simple question as he handed him a plate of food that his mother had prepared for Chris to eat. Even though Chris was homeless, selling drugs, and sleeping in the hallway at Hyatt Court projects, he somehow convinced himself that this building was his territory. He thanked Sincere for the food and as he ate Sincere asked "Hustle Man (his street name) you're a good dude, why do you sell drugs?" Chris looked at him in a daze and could not answer. For some reason that question struck a chord within him. Maybe because it came from a 10-year-old boy who saw something in Chris that he did not see in himself. Sincere gave him a hug and went back into his apartment. After Chris ate his food, he got up, went to the police station to turn himself in for outstanding warrants. The police officers knew Chris and were shocked he turned himself in considering they were not looking for him. Chris was placed in a cell and started the arrest process. He was sent to Essex County Jail and later transferred to Delaney Hall (a program that is an alternative to incarceration) in Newark, NJ. Though he had been to Delaney Hall at least six times, this time was different because he was ready to change his life. He was open minded and went in with an attitude of gratitude thanks to Sincere's words.

Due to the support of counselors at Delaney Hall and attending the group sessions he began to finally take responsibility for his actions and no longer played the blame game. He read and internalized the positive signs on the walls of Delaney Hall and in Ms. Maryam Bey's office, whose case load he was assigned to once again. Chris asked Ms. Bey if she could get him a copy of her lecture on the Laws of Attraction that she had given him on a previous stint in Delaney Hall.

Because he was open for change, blessings came to him. Ms. Bey asked him to accompany her when she conducted lectures. Then one day to his surprise Ms. Bey asked Chris to conduct a lecture. Though he was nervous to speak to his fellow bunkies Ms. Bey assured him that he was ready and that she would be there to support him. Like Sincere, she too saw something in Chris. When he was released from Delaney Hall, Ms. Bey reminded him to contact her at Newark's Office of Reentry once he was released. He did. Upon his arrival home he obtained a job with the City of Newark working for the Sanitation Department in the Mayor's six (6) month program.

Since then Chris has had several jobs. He continues to inspire brothers and sisters who have been addicted to drugs, placed in jail or prison. He accompanies Ms. Bey to halfway houses, treatment programs, colleges, etc. and helps to lecture returning citizens about their responsibility to themselves and their families. He has been a Co-host and has appeared on "Tell A Vision", a TV show created by Ms. Bey. Chris speaks at several events and has appeared on several radio and television programs. He graduated from Integrity House completing his Drug Court obligation. An article written by Star Ledger Reporter Barry Carter in February 2017, entitled "A Life Reclaimed" depicts Chris's journey of transformation. Chris is a member of the Delaney Hall Alumni Association. He obtained his GED, which is a requirement of Drug Court. Through the City of Newark's Affirmative Action Program, he received his OSHA Certification, which affords him access to jobs in the construction trades. His intentions are to become a CADC (Certified Alcohol Drug Counselor) to support those on their road to recovery. Chris has changed his life and is looking forward to his future. In 2017, he received The Four Hours of Power Award, which honors individuals who have become a testimony of success despite life's challenges.

And to think it all started because a little boy named Sincere asked him the question "Hustle man, why do you sell drugs?"