

Fact Sheet: OMAR & PETE



Leon "Omar" Mason

Broadcast – September 13, 2005 on PBS' acclaimed P.O.V. Series

Omar and Pete are determined to change their lives. Both had been in and out of prison for over thirty years — never out longer than six months. This intimate and penetrating film follows these two long-time friends for several years after what they hope will be their final prison release. In that time, their lives take divergent paths as one wrestles with addiction and fear while the other finds success and freedom through helping others.

Omar was just weeks away from the end of a ten-year prison sentence for armed robbery when Oscar-nominated filmmaker Tod Lending began filming him. At the time, Omar had been drug-free for eight years. He was a devout Muslim (he even learned Arabic in prison), and was participating in a new prison release program designed to help long-term recidivists stay out of prison for good. Upon release, the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership supported Omar with case managers, transitional housing, healthcare, employment assistance, and educational opportunities.

Like nine out of 10 men incarcerated in Baltimore, Omar's past crimes were closely tied to his drug addiction. Through the reentry program, substance abuse treatment was available as well. If there was ever a time to break the cycle, this was it.

On the day of his release, Omar reconnects with Pete, a long-time friend, at the transitional house to which he's assigned. Both men had grown up in the same blighted Baltimore neighborhood and struggled with addiction. Pete had been out of prison for ten months and was doing well. Through the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership, he was managing the transitional house and had a job counseling others at a mental health clinic. When Omar arrives, the two rekindle their friendship, become roommates, and support each other through the transition back into society.



William "Pete" Duncan

The film, OMAR & PETE, provides a rare glimpse into an intense and very personal web of support. Case managers, many of them former addicts and former prisoners themselves, dedicate themselves to the mission of redemption — empowering one man at a time. They want to help each take hold of his opportunity, resurrect misused talents and build a satisfying, productive life in society.

This honest and unflinching portrait shows how challenging life on the outside can be for men who've lived much of their lives behind bars. It is a story of what can happen when support is offered — and accepted. And it reveals that no matter how much support is given

— pride, pain and fear are the demons that every man must face in himself.

OMAR & PETE is produced by Tod Lending, Nomadic Pictures.

Campaign Objectives

- Select public television stations in The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* sites (Baltimore, Des Moines, Detroit, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Providence, San Antonio, San Francisco/Oakland, Washington, DC,) received outreach grants to engage in local reentry outreach activities. Stations were invited to partner with the *Making Connections* site teams and a range of local organizations and institutions engaged in reentry to conduct public screenings and discussions to highlight the importance of reentry services and supports for individuals who were formerly incarcerated. Projects helped to build networks and partnerships to

address reentry.

- OMAR & PETE focuses on male inmates and men who were formerly incarcerated, as well as their families, providing an opportunity for stations and community organizations to reach audiences concerned about reentry and the need to strengthen families. The film also focuses on themes of employment, housing, and health (substance abuse).



challenges related to incarceration, as well as to help community stakeholders think more deeply about the issues raised in the documentary.

- Using the Discussion Guide, PBS stations and faith- and community-based organizations will be encouraged to use OMAR & PETE to engage adults and youth who are facing

Campaign Media Tools and Resources

▪ Discussion Guide

Outreach efforts are supported by a Discussion Guide developed by Outreach Extensions, in collaboration with Dr. John Hickey of Tuerk House and Ms. Rada Moss of the Enterprise Foundation's Maryland Re-Entry Partnership.

The Discussion guide will feature:

- Profiles of Omar and Pete
- Overviews of Tuerk House and the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership, key supports in the reentry of Omar and Pete
- Discussion questions on critical elements of a successful reentry; substance abuse; challenges related to employment and housing; alternatives to recidivism
- Reentry statistics in Baltimore City
- Reentry links and resources

▪ Web site

Information on the OMAR & PETE production, including producer's notes, is housed on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign Web site (<http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/r>). All outreach resources are also available on the site, including the Discussion Guide. In addition, the Web site will also feature stories from other men who have successfully completed the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership course and remain in society.

▪ Communications / Technical Assistance

Outreach Extensions provides customized technical assistance to all stations, *Making Connections* sites, and other organizations conducting local grant-funded campaigns. Campaign participants are informed about activities and resources via e-mail on an ongoing basis. Information related to the campaign is also provided in the Reentry E-Newsletter, which is distributed bimonthly.

Site-Based Activity

- Discussion Guide content partners Tuerk House and the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership have planned screening events in **Baltimore** for their clients and the broader community.
- OMAR & PETE has received an official invitation to participate in the 48th San Francisco International Film Festival (April 21-May 5, 2005). It will be juried in the Golden Gate Awards Competition for Best Documentary Feature. In conjunction with the Film Festival, the **Oakland Making Connections** site

team and the San Francisco/Oakland public television partner, KQED, will co-host accompanying outreach events.

- OMAR & PETE will be utilized by the **Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA)** in **Washington, DC**, which serves 19,000 individuals on community supervision. CSOSA has seven local sites that provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals. Each site will have its own copy of the film to share with its clients.
- The **National Religious Affairs Association** plans to utilize OMAR & PETE in 12 clergy training sessions in Texas, in partnership with the Texas Reentry Initiative and Bishop T.D. Jakes' Potter's House congregation.
- The campaign offers community screening tapes for local organizations in key ***Making Connections* sites** for panel discussions, town-hall style meetings, staff and community training events, and local screenings. Outreach Extensions will extend its first free community tape offer for OMAR & PETE in April or June 2005.
- The **Director's Council** in **Des Moines, IA** will include OMAR & PETE in its Reentry Campaign activities in 2005. Outreach Extensions will advise the Council on how to integrate the campaign's media resources into the strategic plan developed by the Council.
- **Rhode Island PBS** and ***Making Connections Providence*** are jointly planning Reentry Campaign activities in 2005, with a focus on women, girls, and families. OMAR & PETE will be one of the selected documentaries – for broadcast and outreach. The *Making Connections* site team has developed a new advisory committee to work with the station to select the documentaries. RIPBS will create another reentry programming strand for broadcast that will feature several Reentry Campaign documentaries.
- **Maryland Public Television** will continue its yearlong reentry effort, *Navigating the Road to Reentry: A Community Approach* and Reentry Campaign activities in 2005. Their work will include several screenings of the local Baltimore story, OMAR & PETE, possibly in conjunction with the Baltimore Mayor's office.
- **Rocky Mountain PBS** in Denver will also participate in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign in 2005. Outreach plans include using the READING RAINBOW "Visiting Day" episode to conduct *Ready To Learn* activities in the *Making Connections* neighborhood. It may also use OMAR & PETE to focus on substance abuse.
- WNET in New York City will continue its outreach campaign, "**Reentry: Life Beyond Bars**" with at least six screening events. OMAR & PETE will be used several times during WNET's 2005 activities.
- **Detroit Public Television** hosted a focus group screening of OMAR & PETE on Monday, November 8, 2004. The preview screening and panel discussion was held at the Schoolcraft College in Garden City, Michigan. Students from the departments of social work, criminal justice, and psychology attended the screening. Clarise Stovall, warden of a local prison, served as moderator of the panel. In addition, Robert Pearce, a professor of criminal justice, participated as a panelist along with additional Schoolcraft faculty and professionals working in the reentry field. Much of the discussion centered on the question, "Will Omar make it?"

- OMAR & PETE was used in a **pilot program to use the film in correctional institutions**. Dr. Janet Hendershot, Chief Psychologist at the Western Correctional Institution in Cumberland, Maryland, has screened the film for the clinical staff at the facility and is planning a screening for the general inmate population.

National Conferences and Partners

- Outreach Extensions continues to expand national exposure of the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, its documentaries, media resources, and outreach activities. OMAR & PETE will be prominently featured at the following national conferences.
 - **NAACP**: July 9 – 14, 2005, Milwaukee
 - **National Urban League**: July 27 – 31, 2005, Washington, DC
- Reentry Campaign grantee, the Interdenominational Theological Center, plans to screen OMAR & PETE continuously at its booth at the annual **Hampton Ministers Conference** in Hampton, VA, June 5 - 10, 2005. This conference brings more than 8,000 clergy to the Hampton University campus each year.
- Outreach Extensions' faith partner, the **National Religious Affairs Association** of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, plans to integrate OMAR & PETE into the national Bureau of Prisons' Transition program. The film will be used by pre-release professionals in federal prisons around the country to help prepare inmates for successful reentry to their communities.
- **Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities (TASC)** is a membership organization representing individuals and programs dedicated to the professional delivery of treatment and case management services to substance abusing populations. More than 100 TASC sites around the country will be offered copies of OMAR & PETE for use in their treatment centers. Outreach Extensions will present the film at TASC's annual conference in Cincinnati, September 12 – 13, 2005.
- OMAR & PETE will be offered to halfway and transitional housing centers throughout the country, through the **Association of Halfway House Alcoholism Programs of North America**, Inc.'s annual conference in Chicago, June 2 – 4, 2005. This organization represents more than 1,500 residential facilities providing long-term, cost effective recovery services to over 120,000 individuals per year.

Funders

Produced by Tod Lending, Nomadic Pictures, OMAR & PETE is funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and The Foundation for Child Development.

The **outreach campaign** was funded by a generous grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation as part of the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign (www.reentrymediaoutreach.org). All productions in the campaign incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**.

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign and other selected documentaries and outreach campaigns are part of the **Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI)**, an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links media broadcasters to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's mission to help build strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families.



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