

From prison to positivity

Formerly incarcerated man recognized for service to others

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RACINE — Avery Nahwahquaw was surprised by the request. He was in an acting class at the Racine Correctional Institution and was asked to play two roles in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” usually performed by women. “My first instinct was, ‘Hell no,’” Nahwahquaw said.



Shailor

After some reflection, though, he decided to try it. “Some part of me thought initially that I was too cool, too tough, but when I really stopped for a moment and took a look at it, I’m like, ‘It’s kind of up my alley,’” Nahwahquaw said. Performing in the Shakespeare play took Nahwahquaw out of his comfort zone, and he learned more about himself.

“I grew in heart and understanding,” Nahwahquaw said. “There was just so much to it, and all amidst the chaos and turmoil and violence that can be the prison system.”

Jonathan Shailor, University of Wisconsin-Parkside communication professor and director of the Shakespeare Prison Project at RCI, asked Nahwahquaw to play the two characters and was impressed by his performances.

“This strong, masculine man devoted himself fully to both of



Avery Nahwahquaw plays with his grandson Noah Nahwahquaw-Kitzke. Nahwahquaw recently received recognition from a nonprofit for leading a service-oriented life after 23 years of incarceration.

COURTESY OF AVERY NAHWAHQUAW

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Former Case staff member accused of assault

RUSD says it is supporting investigation

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MOUNT PLEASANT — A former Racine Unified School District employee has been accused of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old student.

Justin Jolen Lizama, who worked at Case High School as an event staff employee, is charged with child enticement and sexual assault of a student by school staff.

“Mr. Lizama is no longer employed by RUSD,” said Stacy Tapp, chief of communication and community engagement for RUSD. “We recently became aware of the allegations and are supporting the police with their investigation.”

Allegations against Lizama

The Mount Pleasant Police Department began investigating Lizama in June after being made aware of allegations of an inappropriate relationship between him and a 16-year-old female Case student.

According to the criminal complaint, MPPD investigators talked with the girl, who allegedly told them that on May 16, she was sitting under a tree near the Delta Hotel after school when Lizama drove up in his car.

Lizama allegedly asked the girl to get into the car, and according to the complaint, the girl, who described herself as a runaway, agreed to because she “had nowhere to go” — although she also allegedly told investigators that she was scared.

The complaint alleges Lizama took the girl to his house and gave her a marijuana blunt, which she smoked, and which the girl said caused her to be “out.”

The girl told investigators that after smoking the marijuana, she and Lizama had sex on his bed before falling asleep, according to the complaint.

The complaint said the girl told investigators that Lizama dropped her off at the hotel the next morning instead of Case High School, which she believed was to prevent anyone from seeing them together.

The girl also allegedly told investigators that there were more incidents of sexual activity between her and Lizama, and chat messages between her and Lizama reportedly found on the girl’s phone discussed their relationship and sexual activity.

Lizama is scheduled to appear at the Racine County Courthouse on Sept. 6 for a preliminary hearing.

If convicted on the child



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Jim Schatzman, from left, Hope Wesley-Early and Michael Wright were at Racine Vocational Ministry on Monday. Wright was RVM’s 5,000 placement.

Racine Vocational Ministry placed 5,000 people into jobs over 20 years

Participants were once inmates or struggling with unemployment

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RACINE — Racine Vocational Ministries celebrated placing 5,000 people who were incarcerated or struggling with unemployment into the workforce or education in May.

RVM was started by Jim Schatzman in 2002, and has placed 5,048 people into jobs as of August. In 2022, RVM placed 220 people into schools or jobs, and 17 were promoted to a higher position within the first year of employment.

RVM has two programs. The Second Chance program is open people who were formerly incarcerated and reentering into the community, and the Jobs program is open to anyone struggling with unemployment or underemployment.

Michael Wright was a part of the Second Chance program and was the 5,000th placement across RVM.

Wright said he was in and out of prison for 33 years and most recently was released in April 2021. Wright said he went to RVM in May 2021, and it helped point him in the right direction.

“I always had a goal, but sometimes things get sidetracked,” Wright said. “When I come into RVM, I see the sayings on the walls and that little thing helps me. I can smell the fear and I can feel it, but I have the courage to move forward.”

Since participating in the Second Chance program at RVM,



COURTESY OF RACINE VOCATIONAL MINISTRY

Michael Wright said he was in and out of prison for 33 years before he started Racine Vocational Ministry’s Second Chance program.

“It feels good to have some responsibility.”

Michael Wright

Wright said he has become sober, started working as an injection molder, and acquired a house and car.

Wright is also more involved at his church and has been “instrumental” in trying to get a 12-step recovery program started there, according to his case manager, Hope Wesley-Early.

Both programs have three parts: prepare, plan and proceed. In the first step, participants meet with a case worker to develop a plan.

case worker to develop soft skills, get a GED or other degree or go through certain trainings.

In the final step of the program, participants are hired into jobs or placed into schools. Job counselors from RVM help set up interviews for participants with local businesses and coach the participants for interviews.

“It feels good to have some responsibility,” Wright said. “That’s what I look forward to every day.”

Schatzman said the program often takes longer than a normal job placement company because they are focused on making sure their participants can be successful.

“That frustrates some people,” Schatzman said. “But the folks who hang in there, their success rates are way above the people who contract agencies because they’ve had that foundational training before they went into the job.”

In 2022, RVM’s recidivism rate, or rate of people who reoffended, was 1% for one year, 4% for two years and 8% for three years, Schatzman said.

The state average recidivism rate from 2016 to 2018 was 15.2% for one year, 26.1% for two years and 33.3% for three years, according to a Wisconsin Department of Corrections study.

“We help out folks to get fully engaged in their own lives with stable housing and transportation. If that happens, they are almost surely going to be hired because there’s so much need for workers right now,” Schatzman said. “It’s been a really different place for RVM. For most of our years, we really had to work hard and hustle to find employment opportunities, but they’re very plentiful right now.”