

VOICE

Issue 16 / 2022

REENTRY Q&A

Oris was born in Marin County and raised in both Marin and Richmond, across the bay. He graduated from Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley. He said, "I was a pretty good kid. Later in

life, I got involved with drugs. That's where my criminal life started. But, for the most part, I was a pretty decent kid. It just took a turn for the worse when I started messing with drugs."

Is your family still in the Bay Area? Can you share a little bit about that?

"My mother and father have passed away. I still have family ties in the Bay Area—in Marin County and Richmond. I still have some out in Antioch, and I have a son in San Francisco. I have a lot of friends out there in the Bay Area."

Where are you now?

"I'm in Antioch, in a better sober living home."

I'm glad you're somewhere safe. If you could describe yourself in one word, what word would that be?

"One word, right? I got one: I'm humble."

Why did you choose that word?

"I say humble because I'm slow to react to certain things now. I used to immediately jump into things as far as responding. Now, I'm more laid-back as opposed to just reacting. I also feel at peace; that comes to mind. I'm in a position now where I help people as opposed to strike and fear, you know? It's a good feeling. It's a very good feeling. Church has a lot to do with it, and try-

ing to live accordingly. With that spirit comes humbleness."

What has been most helpful to you in your reentry?

"What's been most helpful to me has been family support, friends' support, even parole agents. Also, the lady that's allowed me to stay here in the sober living home; she's been very instrumental in me getting back on my feet. I attended NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings and stuff

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Did you know that reference desk librarians in city public libraries can help you access us through our websites? Ask them to search for "Reentry Success Center Richmond" and "Reentry Network Antioch" to get you connected.

PROGRAMS

Contra Costa Reentry Network: Going Places

The Contra Costa Reentry Network assists justice-impacted residents with paperwork and other requirements toward getting them back on their feet. Staff provide employment and housing support, as well as referrals for peer mentoring, educational and vocational opportunities, mental health programs, alcohol and other drugs treatments, and family and community reunification programs. In short, the Reentry Network does it all.

"We meet everyone where they are," said Charmaine Hoggatt, managing director for HealthRIGHT 360, which operates the Reentry Network. "We aim to improve the quality of life for all returning residents, their families, and their

communities, and we work with them to ensure they don't go back into the system."

The Reentry Network is a field-based service, which means staff typically go out and meet with residents anywhere in their coverage area. The Reentry Network serves Central and East County—the cities of Antioch, Bay Point, Brentwood, Danville, Martinez, Oakley, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek—and is open five days a week.

The Reentry Network proudly launched a new program after it received a California Community Reinvestment Grant earlier this year. The program, funded by the California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, provides services to anyone residing in Contra Costa County who seeks mental health and substance use services.

The Network's mental health offerings include individual counseling **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**


The Reentry Network proudly launched a new program after it received a California Community Reinvestment Grant.

EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers, Every issue of this newspaper aspires to be accessible, inspirational, practical, and forward-thinking. This issue is no different: our aim is true. As the pandemic continues, we're humbled that heartfelt stories from the community continue to pour in, and we're honored to collect and share them with you, regardless of where you are at this moment. We're also grateful to be alive, and we're grateful that you are, too.

As you probably already know, change doesn't happen in a vacuum: Change happens while in community. This issue shines a spotlight on such partnerships—with other individuals, with other groups, and even with a higher power. Through those partnerships, we become accountable to ourselves and one another. That makes joy arise. That makes liberation within reach.


Charmaine Hoggatt
The Reentry Network


Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

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Antonia Fernandez: Supporting Recovery

Antonia Fernandez is an AB 109 substance use counselor for Contra Costa County’s Alcohol & Other Drugs Services (AODS). In a recent issue, she laid out AODS’s focuses. What follows is a longer interview covering AODS’s partnership with the Reentry Success Center, insights from being in the field, and what’s in store for AODS in the future.

How did the partnership between your division and the Reentry Success Center get started?

“I believe there was a conversation between the County, the Reentry Success Center, and community-based organizations about what the future for the Center could look like. I was not here in the county at that point. I came into the county about 2018 and there was a memorandum of understanding for the Reentry Success Center to have some kind of collaboration with Alcohol & Other Drugs Services (AODS). When I came about, nobody from my division had been there yet. My division wanted me to touch bases there, and they connected me with Pat Mims.

“I’m there to build rapport with the clients and get a feel for the Center and the community. I learned that Contra Costa is a huge community—huge! I’ve now been on one end of the county to the other end of the county. My favorite is the Reentry Success Center, because it works.

“The way the Center works—watching the need there, being right on the main street, and having an iconic building that’s easy to find as well as easy to access, providing services under one hub—is amazing. It’s an idea many people dream of: to have one place and the opportunity to access all these types of services under one roof. It’s amazing! It became a passion for me. Like, ‘How can I be more a part of this?’

“It’s difficult when you’re reentering society, or getting back on your feet, or whatever the barrier may be, to be able to sit still in a clean, healthy, positive environment. To take a look at some of the things that are offered and then to work on them with somebody—who is not there so much as to hold your hand, but who will partner with you to access and direct and navigate—is amazing to me, because we don’t know how to navigate some of these systems.”

I like the way that you distinguish between holding someone’s hand and being there to help them navigate.

“I want to say I learned that when I first started working with Pat—the way he talked about the navigation tools that the Center has. They navigate, and that caught on. The way we talk to clients at the Center is very specific: ‘We’re here to navigate you.’ ‘We’re not here to tell you what to do.’ ‘We’re not here to make you do anything.’ ‘We’re here to help you work on what things you have listed here.’ And so on.

“Working with Pat gave me the opportunity to come in and ask, ‘What’s needed here?’ and ‘How can we assist?’ Pat gave me a space and my chief gave him a counselor—myself—and we’ve built this partnership together.

“I’m just really glad to be on this journey, because I understand the population. When I first came on, I remember telling Pat, ‘I’m your recovery cheerleader. I can motivate. I can talk on the recovery side.’ Of course, recovery is not for everybody, and I get that. I’m willing to meet clients wherever they’re at and figure it out, and then address however they want to address it.

I’m not here just to make everybody sign up for drug and alcohol treatment, but to help people navigate their substance use issues.

“Even though I’m a substance use disorder counselor for the county, and I refer people to our programs, it’s not all that I do. I support and help clients address their substance use issues in many ways, whether that’s helping them figure out community-based support or giving them an understanding of what services are available.”

When did things click for you that this place, this Center, is different? Was there an *aha!* moment?

“I was spending half a day once a week there. Then I started asking to increase my hours there because I wasn’t getting the full picture. Then I got the okay to spend all of my day there. I would check in at the office and then go to the Reentry Success Center and get the feel of what part is mine—what part am I going to address? Also, how do I add to the services that are available? It’s a different culture; the culture is very rich there. The community’s really tight. And there’s definitely a need for services.

“I felt like I need to educate them. I need to let them know that these are their services. It’s like, if you go grocery shopping, we can’t force you to buy anything. But, if you have substance abuse issues, you can get the services and get them addressed. What’s that list of things look like? And,

*Addiction is a disease.
It’s not something
somebody just chooses.*

what does that mean? Giving clients the information to make better, informed choices around their substance abuse issues is what clicked for me, because they often don’t know how things have changed. They don’t know how to access the services, so I’m here to fill in the blanks, whatever that may look like.”

What’s in store in your division? What are you seeing down the line? What would you like our readers to know?

“I would like them to know AODS is up and running; we never stopped. The Reentry Success Center was right behind this, and they were calling and going, ‘Hey, we’re open!’ This county adjusted and responded to COVID amazing, as far as getting people into treatment. My boss’s term for us was ‘adjust and respond, adjust and respond.’ Every single week, we were adjusting and responding how we were getting clients in as things started tightening up.

“We were pulled from other places. I was no longer going into the Reentry Success Center. Some of the other counselors weren’t going to their sites. We were pulled back and started working remotely, but still referred and got people into treatment. There’s five in our team, including a Spanish-speaking counselor. We support clients through different levels of care. All these things were happening behind the scenes to get clients into treatment. We remained in order to keep our programs open and keep clients in their beds.

“As things have opened back up, we found the resources needed to continue to adjust and respond. We continue to keep things flowing.

We have an amazing director who stays on top of things and reminds us that we work for the clients. And that we need to keep their services open. My heart is for the client, so I get that. This is one of the things that fills my heart, because that’s what I want to do. I want to work with people, and I get that opportunity at the Reentry Success Center. They have that same passion. That was my aha moment, when I realized they believe in these clients.

“The clients are the heart and soul of the Center, just as the clients with substance use issues—and us addressing and helping them address their issues—is the heart and soul of this department. Pat is strong for me, because I know what it can do, when you help an addict. I know that the whole family recovers. I know that from experience: I’ve seen it happen. I don’t care how many times it takes. We’ll respond, and adjust, and try to figure it out, because this disease is rippled across the nation. I don’t want to watch it. I want to win the battle. I want to be part of the front line.”

Do you have anything else that you’d like to share with our readers?

“What I want readers to understand is, like any other disease, it’s a struggle. It’s life changing. It’s heartbreaking. The disease of addiction gets overlooked as a moral judgment, and it’s not a moral judgment; it’s not a moral decision. It’s been proven that it’s a disease, because it affects the way addicts behave and the way addicts think. It affects their conscious thinking. Just like cancer, it riddles their life.

“When looking at the addict, remembering that it’s a disease—it’s not something somebody just chooses. It’s a choice to engage in it, yes, but I don’t think anybody chooses to become an addict, just like nobody chooses to get cancer. You can get cancer from smoking cigarettes. I don’t think anybody picks up cigarettes, saying, ‘I want to smoke to get cancer.’ I don’t think people pick up any kind of substance, choosing to get this disease, but yet it still happens.

“We can help people recover. People recover every single day with a little bit of help and support, and addressing the addiction and the other things that come with it. Working on it, just as we would any other disease, with a team of people. We see people transform from this disease and get back on their feet. That’s what I want people to remember: Look at it as you would any other disease. And please take away the stigma. The stigma is not true, it’s a lie. People don’t just choose to do this, although it happens.”

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NETWORK, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

sessions and cognitive behavioral groups. The Network’s substance use disorder treatments include harm reduction healing circles, relapse prevention groups, and recovery support. Groups typically meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 10:00–11:30 am and 1:15–2:45 pm.

“It’s exciting to be able to offer these services to the community,” said Andrea Lopez, the Reentry Network’s administrative coordinator. “The past two years have been difficult for all of us. I’m hopeful that this grant, and these services, will help our returning residents gain the valuable skills they need to succeed in life.”

The Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT360 is located at 5119 Lone Tree Way in Antioch, and is open Monday–Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. For more information about the California Community Investment Grant and to access services, please contact Andrea Lopez at (925) 732-1372.

Isaiah is a proud father, husband, and breadwinner. He spent almost nine years in the California state prison system: “Five of those years in penitentiary and three of those years in the conservation camps throughout the state. The farthest south

I’ve been was La Cima Conservation Camp, outside of San Diego. And, the farthest north I’ve been was Growlersburg Conservation Camp, in Growlersburg (recently renamed Georgetown, CA). It was a learning curve, of course. As crazy as this may sound, I’m happy that I had the time to sit down, reflect, understand, gain empathy, feel remorse, and things of that nature. And really understanding that solitude is a blessing.

“In solitude you have peace of mind, and you can find out what the solutions are. When you come up with the problems, you come up with the solutions, as well. I ultimately understood that the track I was on wasn’t going to get me anywhere I wanted to be. I transitioned from trying to fit in to standing out. The penitentiary is nowhere near where I wanted to be. I wanted to educate myself and get as much as I can, knowing that we’re all allotted 24 hours no matter who we are, what social class or circumstance: We all have 24 hours in the day. Understanding that in the penitentiary, while I have all that solitude, I can utilize that for games and put myself in a situation like I’m in now.

“I was born on the East Coast and raised in the Bay Area, in Antioch, where I spend most of my time. I just had my first-born, just got a job, just got on salary. That’s all I’ve been waiting for. I was able to go through the Reentry Success Center. It gave me tools and access to stuff that parole didn’t, and I’m thankful for that. I got a laptop that I used to write my résumé. Rick Fortenberry geared me on the clear, straight path, hooked me up with Bay Area Legal Aid, and now my record is expunged and I got exonerated. My record is clean. So, I can apply to pretty much anything I want to as long as it makes sense to me. I owe it all to God, first and foremost, and the Reentry Success Center and my drive to understand that it’s up to me to be successful. Nobody’s gonna do it for me, but I can utilize the tools I need to make that happen.

“Being a father is great. Loving all the little stuff he’s doing—the cooing he’s doing, even changing the diaper. I wouldn’t give it up for anything. I’m thankful that I’m in this spot and situation where I’m able to provide for him and give him the best life. He’s real observant. So I’m happy. I’m glad he’s having all the fun.

“If I had to describe himself in one word, it would be “‘extraordinary,’ because I do what I want. I don’t do things to make other people happy. I do things to make myself happy. I know that I’m a good person. So, what I’m doing is gonna be beneficial to a lot of people. I just want to shine and pass that on to everybody else.

“I truly believe that going to the conservation camp was the best decision I made in my life. Because I knew how to work hard, how to be a man, how to work with different personalities to achieve a common goal. That’s life, that’s living. We do that every single day. And understanding that I’m doing this hard, physical, arduous labor for \$1 an hour—\$1 an hour. I’m putting my life on the line to help other people, who are never going to know if it was me that saved all the growth for their cattle, their acreage, their homes. I’m never going to get recognition for that. And, I’m fine with that, because it’s moving with integrity and honor.

“When I came home, I told myself, ‘If I’m making \$1 an hour in a conservation camp, under the jurisdiction of Cal Fire, I need to hold myself to a high standard and demand a higher wage.’ Right now, I make \$36 an hour. I’m on salary. So, just knowing that, and understanding my worth, and understanding that nobody’s gonna give it to me—I got to get it for myself and my family. Knowing that, as long as I stay busy, I’m gonna stay out of trouble. I can do everything that somebody who had never been locked up can do. Everything I learned from having solitude, finding out what the problems were, and coming up with solutions.

“I think solitude and silence coincide. I think they correlate, and I think they are teachers. Stay focused. There’s a lot of temptation out here. Just know that if you’re doing what you need to do, it’ll come to you. I’m not going to say it’ll be instant. But, if you work hard, take your time, and do what you need to do, everything that you’re working on will come your way.

“My biggest weakness, my biggest Kryptonite, was being on parole: having people that kind of held me back, having that weight and chain, not being able to apply for jobs that I needed, waiting to get parole to sign off on things, not being able to continue employment. I served my time. I could serve my time defending the state against these devastating wildfires, with chainsaws and axes and all types of hand tools that, in the penitentiary, would be considered a weapon. But I’m still having to pee in a cup and answer to people who really don’t have my best interests in mind. That was my biggest weakness right there.

“My biggest strength? Maturation—I can’t stress that enough. You need to be mature out here, and have realistic thoughts and goals, so that you can achieve them. I can’t tell you how many times I had to sit in groups and listen to people lie and talk a bunch of nonsense. Just have realistic goals, be mature, be responsible, and have the right mindset. Don’t be on the yard, hot-siding. Keep it real, keep it 100 percent. Understanding that being real is being yourself. Don’t try to be like other people trying to fit in. Be yourself.

“Parole is not going to do it for you. You got to do it for yourself. If you follow through and do it, and you’re at a conservation camp, it’s Penal Code 1203.4b: Order of motion for early discharge and successful termination of parole, and to set aside and dismiss conviction. If you were at conservation camp and you’re able to do this, do it: I’m living proof. I’m the breadwinner of my family. My significant other is a stay-at-home mom. She doesn’t have to work: I make enough to live comfortably. It’s because my record is expunged. I can apply for good jobs. Have realistic goals, follow through and achieve those, and understand that nobody’s going to do it for you, you have to do it for yourself.

“It’s important and necessary to participate in these reentry centers, to get linked up with coaches, and to do the support groups, because it’s therapy. It’s always good to explode, but explode in a good way, instead of imploding, because when you implode you hurt yourself. Being able to let out your thoughts and feelings in these groups, go to the park and pick up trash, and do

landscaping, get linked up, and socialize and get those socialization skills back to how they need to be in society—so you can be successful. I advise everybody, when they get out: Find your local reentry center and get linked up with a career coach and put the work in. It’s worth it.”

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ORIS, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
like that. That also helps me stay positive. It’s a blessing. I believe all these things contribute to me being in the position that I’m in right now.

“Of course, there’s the District Attorney’s Office and the Public Defender’s Office. Without them I wouldn’t be here: I still had another 18 years. I was sentenced to 49 years-to-life under the three-strikes law. I did 26 years.

“They came with the 1170(d) resentencing law, and the District Attorney of San Francisco and the Public Defender’s Office felt that I deserved to get out. They petitioned and the courts granted it.”

That’s fantastic! That’s 18 years where you have the option to do whatever you want to do with your life. What advice would you give to a loved one who’s about to reenter society?

“I would tell them to surround themselves with as many positive people as they possibly can. If they had any drug issues or anything like that, I would tell them that it would be very important to attend NA/AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings.

“Depending on what they were in there for, I would try to lead them to the way of the church. I found church to be good for me. I try to stay as positive as possible. Change your life.

“Looking back, you’ve done your time, and you paid your debt to society. Now, you’re starting over. So, start off good and continue to do good.”

Thinking positively is one thing and doing it consistently, every day, is another thing altogether. What are some things that you’ve tried to make a habit of thinking and doing positive things?

“First of all, reuniting with the people that I love; I never want to lose that again. Second, setting up a routine—things that I know I need to work on. Coming from there, you know what your problems were. So adjust the problem and attack that in the best way possible, staying positive.

“These sober living homes have rules. They help you stay intact, because, if you don’t, you can very easily find yourself locked up again or homeless. Homelessness is rough, especially with COVID. It’s really rough on a person to be on parole and have nowhere to stay.

“I also had a parole officer that understood how much time I’d done and what I went through, and they were cordial and respectful. As long as you have mutual respect, anything can be accomplished. That’s what we had: We had mutual respect. I went through about six parole officers within 12 months—a year and one week.”

Do you have any additional thoughts you’d like to share with our readers?

“If you know somebody coming out and is on parole, just give them a chance—give people a chance. For the most part, you won’t regret it, because lots them have done a lot of time, and they’re not trying to go back. They have been rehabilitated, for the most part, so have an open heart. That’s all.

“I almost forgot. I also want to thank Mike Pitts and HealthRIGHT 360 for helping me get my housing, and also Rubicon Programs for helping me with the workshops and getting a job.”

EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Women’s Group

5:30-7:30pm, a safe space open to women for engaging conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center through the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Meeting ID: 819 7876 0844, Passcode: rscwsg8#)

WEDNESDAYS (ONGOING)

Restorative Practices: Arts Class

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center through the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Meeting ID: 864 7699 0822, Passcode: rscart1!)

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

Restorative Circles

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center through the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Meeting ID: 822 5859 0377, Passcode: rscir1#)

FRIDAYS (ONGOING)

Forward Thinking Men’s Group

5:30-7:30pm, open to men for decompression and sharing of challenges, barriers, achievements, and everyday events, Reentry Success Center through the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Meeting ID: 838 3610 6614, Passcode: 537151)

OTHER

Transportation Services

8:30am-8:00pm, Monday-Friday, available for free to justice-impacted members in West County and Martinez to the Reentry Success Center; call (510) 679-2122 for more information; people who are in custody and awaiting release from county jail, please connect to this service through the Game Change for Success (GPS) program

Mobile Resource App

Housing assistance, employment, education, vocational training, legal services, recovery support, and family support services made accessible directly on a smartphone, through the following QR Code:



Reentry Network App

EXPLORATIONS

We want to promote your artwork, photography, and poetry. Please write us at one of the mailing addresses below. Be sure to include “Reentry Newsletter Explorations” in the subject line.

POETRY

“The Lead,” by Terrell, which originally aired on WAMU radio in Washington, D.C.

I thought I was leading the path to be all I can be
But along my journey something was calling me
Pinching me, and poking at my skin
I turned around and looked over my shoulder
And seen it was the streets calling me over
Slowly taking me off the track from what I believe
And had me questioning my ability to LEAD
Everyone that followed went astray
Because they seen I started to go a different way
Seeing me sink was something they couldn’t stand
So my people helped me up by lending me a hand

Terrell was convicted of carjacking and spent six years in prison from the age of 16. When his poem aired, he was enrolled in an apprenticeship training program to become a window glazier. Terrell said he loves sharing his story at schools through a nonprofit organization.

GAMES

Fill in the blank squares, so each row, each column, and each block contain all digits 1 thru 9. Answers will be in the next issue.

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ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

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healthRIGHT360.org



Contra Costa County
30 Muir Road
Martinez, CA 94553
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The following icons are included in the sections and next to specific events as a visual aid, for readers who prefer to scan our content. We hope you find them useful.



Housing



Education



Benefits



Family



Health



Legal



Financial



Employment