

VOICE

Issue 17 / 2022

REENTRY PROFILE



Kelly is 42, has a GED and some college experience. He paints houses, does carpentry work, and also does in-home care, working with elderly people. "I have four kids. My kids, they're doing good. I just had a daughter. She just made one [year] in June. My oldest is 19 [years old], and she goes to Alabama State. My son is in Los Angeles; I don't get to see him much. And I have another daughter that just made 13 [years]. I'm with her every day. I'm with her and my baby every day.

"I'm from Oakland, California. I'm a Warriors fan—I'm living for the Golden State Warriors. I've been a Warriors fan since Don Nelson was the coach, since they were losing with Chris Mullen and Tim Hardaway. I remember all 'em guys: Donyell Marshall and Monta Ellis. That was, like, in the '80s, and we weren't doing nothing but losing. And all our talent, they'd come for a year or two and then go somewhere else and become stars."

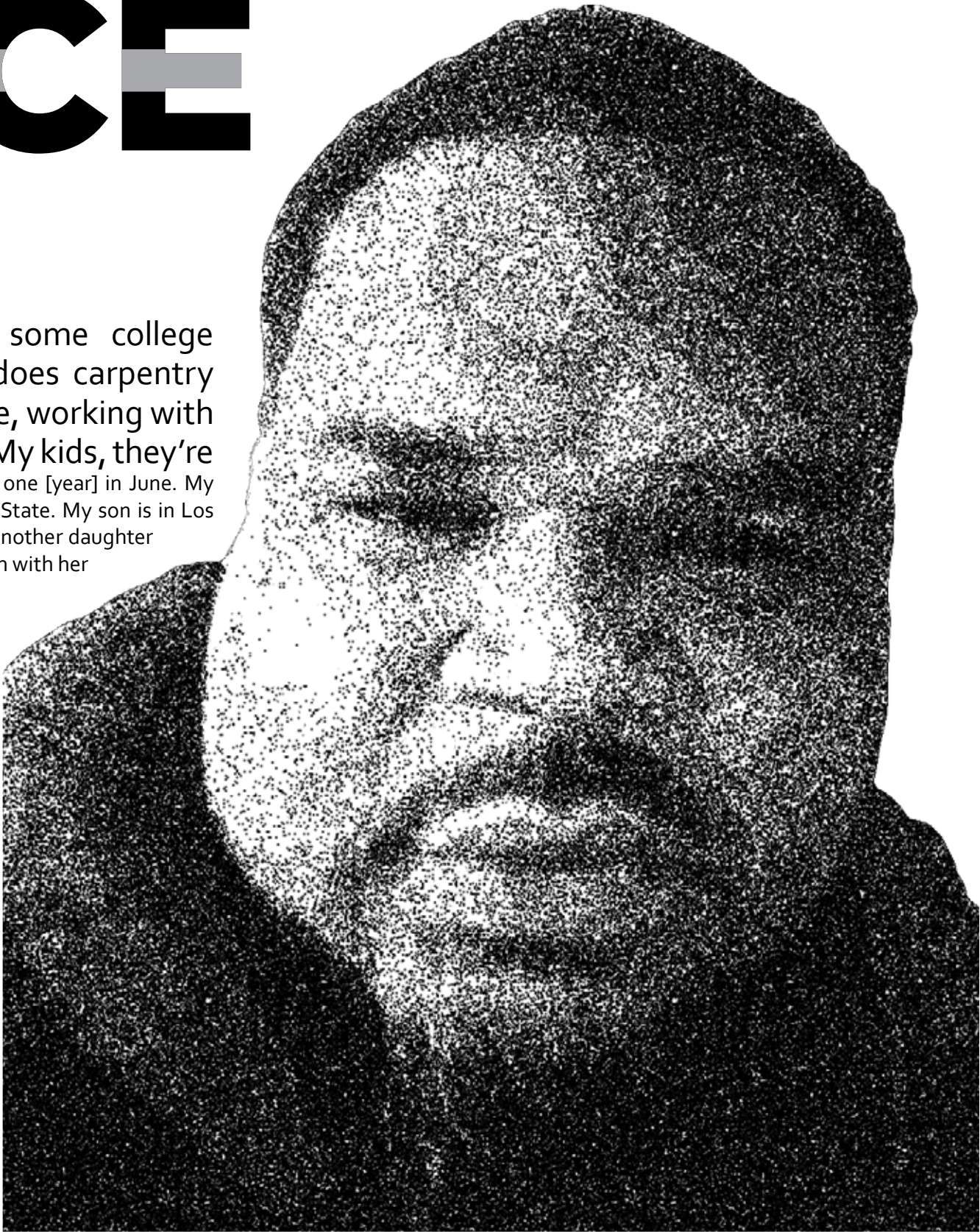
Kelly describes himself as meticulous, "because I like things a certain way. Like, with cars, I just like certain things and I like things a certain way. So, I work hard to get what I want in life. It doesn't mean that I won't accept something if it's not what I like, but I will turn it into what I'm comfortable with."

During his reentry, Kelly said Mz Shirliz was "very helpful. Mz Shirliz is a sober living home, so it got me off the street, and I didn't have to pay rent. I went to meetings, and everything, pretty much every day. I had house chores. It was a six-month program. I got to stay there six months, free.

"Mz Shirliz changed the way I was thinking. I had to give myself more credit than what I normally gave myself. I always thought that I couldn't quit smoking cigarettes, I couldn't stop drinking, I couldn't stop smoking weed—you know, things like that. I never gave myself enough strength to think that I could overcome those things. Living at Mz Shirliz I didn't have a choice. I had to have a clean urinalysis, and I quit smoking cigarettes. I started smoking cigarettes at, like, 15 [years old], and I smoked cigarettes for about 15-20 years. I haven't had a cigarette in six years, and I was sober. It shows the strength in me, and I carry that with me now."

When things in life get hard, Kelly said he relies on his father. "My dad is in my life now. I grew up without him. The majority of growing up, my dad wasn't around. He was in and out, you know? My dad, he's been clean and sober now for about 13 years, and he's done his time in and out of jail, and things like that. Nowadays, he's working as a professor in college. He went back to school and he got his degrees. He's working on a doctorate, and he teaches college courses. My dad is a big help. My mom, she also helps me. My girlfriend. And my kids. That's basically my support system. And then, from time to time, I go to the HealthRIGHT 360 meetings and go to Alcohol Anonymous meetings."

Kelly's reentry advice is "be patient. Don't rush things—enjoy the **CONTINUES ON PAGE 3**



DID YOU KNOW



COVID-19 Updates

In a recent television news program, President Biden declared that the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The question many asked afterwards is: For whom?

"I'm vaccinated," Kelly said in his reentry profile (in this issue). "I haven't caught COVID-19 the whole time it's happened, but my daughter had it twice. My girlfriend had it once or twice. My baby had it once or twice. I don't know what it's like or what the experience is, but I don't play with it. I'm at that age where it could either kill me or I could recover fast—like, I'm right there. So, you never know: You could recover quick or it could still knock you down. I don't want to be guessing with that."

Most experts around the globe, who continue to track COVID-19, agree with Kelly: Now is not the time to stop the basic habits that have kept us alive throughout this pandemic. You can continue to reduce your chances of being infected by trying to maintain a distance of 3 ft. to 6 ft. from anyone who is coughing or sneezing, whenever possible. And do seek medical attention and a CDC-approved COVID test **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**

EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers,
We're still alive. You're still alive. Take a few moments and simply let those words into your consciousness: You're still alive.

Next, try and pay attention to where those words take you. If you can and are willing, focus even further by exploring where those words *feel* inside your body.

Do you feel those words in your heart? Do you feel a heaviness or lightness there? Do you feel the words stuck in your throat? Do you feel them down in your stomach? Try and jot down why.

This issue spotlights stories of what it means to be alive and what it means to continue living, which seems to feel more important now than ever before. If, however, these questions are too much, right now, that's okay, too. We still got you.

Charmaine
Charmaine Hoggatt
The Reentry Network

Pat
Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

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Vernon was in his twenties when he was sentenced for the third time. Unfortunately, the State of California had passed a three-strikes law, which meant he was given sentence of 28 years-to-life with the possibility of parole. “I never thought in a million years

I’d get out of prison after serving 28 years, and having a 28-year-to-life sentence. Getting struck out in 1994 on the three-strikes law and serving over 25 years and being in prison has really taught me a lot.

“Growing up, I was this guy that went to Sunday school and church every Sunday. I always did everything my mom told me to do. I had to do it all. Growing up was pretty hard in the Sunnydale projects in San Francisco. I knew nothing about Richmond. I knew nothing about none of this. I was just growing up in San Francisco, being with my mom with six kids: three boys and three girls. I was the knucklehead of the three boys in my family. It’s remarkable to know that I’m 60 years young today.

“I was in prison from 1994 to July 2021, when I got off of a life sentence. As I’m incarcerated in these prisons—I went to four different prisons, maybe five or six different—oh god, it was terrible—I came to find out I got stage four lung cancer. I was losing a lot of weight. I was getting tired. I was fatigued. A lot of stuff was happening. I was, like, ‘Why? Why is this happening?’

“One of my doctors did the x-ray, and everything, and found this large mass in my right lung. That was one of the issues. I also had a leaky valve, so they couldn’t cut the cancer out, or whatever. So every 21 days, I did chemo.

“I was going out every 21 days, to go and do chemo. I was getting all this poison in me, going to chemo, and had three or four friends who were going to chemo with me, all while we were incarcerated and in the same building in Solano State Prison.

“Two with me had to go to hospice, because they didn’t want to live. The cancer just got them so bad. Every time we’d go to chemo and come back, all they’d want to do is lay down and just kick back and do nothing to nothing. I used to tell my two buddies, ‘Come on, man. After we cut chemo and after we rest, we gotta walk around and get stronger.’ But they never wanted to. They always wanted to lay down because the cancer was hurting them so bad. They were scared of it. I’m, like, ‘Don’t be scared of it. We could beat it.’

“I was always this person helping out others behind the wall, because I gravitate to all the different entities in prison. They all loved me so much, because I was one same person. I never changed to be somebody else. I never changed my style of loving people, even though I was surrounded by different attitudes and different personalities every day. For some reason, I was the one that always had the voice to make something right. Even though the environment was always violent, I was this cheerful, happy-go-lucky person.

“Every night, I would pray for peace, joy. I didn’t let it beat me. I beat it. The doctors don’t see cancer in me right now, but my chemo doctor tells

me that it could come back any time. I still have aches and pains from the chemo, because I still take it sometimes.

“I’m doing this so maybe somebody would read this and say, ‘Wow, if he could do this or if he could do that, or if he spoke this, then I could have enough courage to speak my story or get my story out there.’ I just want to put my voice out there to help somebody that might want to hear something or read something that just clicks with them. They could be, like, ‘Wow, that’s me all the way!’ Or, ‘Wow, I could do it too! If he could do it after so many years, I could do it.’

“I let go and spoke, let out some of my inner soul, that’s been waiting to be released. That’s the honest truth. Everything that a person should speak, it should be honest, it should be true, it should be real. It has to come from within.

“If I could describe myself in one word, that one word would be ‘honest.’ And another word: ‘true.’ One word that’s even better: ‘love.’ Once I start, I can’t stop!

“I’m in this place right now where the cancer... I’m not gonna let nothing tear me down. I’ve had so many obstacles since being at home from prison. But every obstacle...I got up and walked through it. It doesn’t scare me now, because I’ve been through it. If something happens, the tools that I got, the tools that I learned...you won’t be able to describe the way. All you can do is take it one step at a time, one day at a time, and just continue to make people happy.

“When I’m walking down the street, people have this smile on their face, because here’s this joy and love coming by. I always greet people with a smile, because—you never know—you can make somebody’s day by just saying hello.

“To keep moving forward, I am heavy into church. I grew up in church. I’m working to be a deacon for my church. I go to work. I come home. I take care of my mom. I’m a mama’s boy. I want you to hear that—and the readers—because, being a mama’s boy, there’s nothing wrong with that. She’s what kept me sane. She prayed 25 years for me to come home. I’m home, and I’m taking care of my mom, and life is good right now.

“I’m not on my feet yet, but I’m getting there. What’s been helping me is coming every single day to the Reentry Success Center and learning new ways and learning new goals that I need to put in my life. The brain is so fragile: you have to handle it with care. My thinking is so awesome right now. I lost every ugly thinking that I used to think. I don’t even think it anymore.

“My vision is to have everything be stable, to be secure financially, to have everything I want to be successful. A car: I don’t have a car yet; I get on the bus. I got a job that only pays, like, \$164 every two weeks. And it’s only four days a week that I have to work. I’m still breathing. I’m still alive. I’m

My vision is to have everything be stable, to be secure financially, to have everything I want to be successful. I’m still breathing. I’m still alive. I’m not ready to say I’m on my feet yet.

COVID-19, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

if you experience these symptoms: sore throat, runny nose, persistent cough, and headache.

What’s also important to remember is a key benefit that’s widely available now (that wasn’t available back in 2020): vaccines and booster shots, especially the newest booster shot that protects against both the original virus as well as its most contagious version, omicron (specifically BA.4 and BA.5).

So far, the number of Americans who have received the latest booster shot is lower than expected. Some people who haven’t received the booster shot cite fatigue—they’re simply exhausted and “over” being concerned about infection. Others are on the fence, taking a wait-and-see approach. So many unanswered questions remain, while at the same time more people continue to get sick and die from COVID-19 complications.

Tiombe Mashama, program coordinator for Contra Costa County Health Services’ Re-entry Health Conductors, offered some insights.

“I think if you’re asking about [vaccines and booster shots], you’re feeling something about it,” Mashama said. “And, honestly, I have to tell people that any time you ask about something, you really do know the answer.”

She added: “I had questions, and I waited and I waited until I found something to hang my conscience on. I can only say this to people who ask me about anything around boosters and COVID-19: I want to do all that I can to make sure that we get this [pandemic] under wraps, that we can move forward in society with people that are daring enough to say, ‘I’ll be the guinea pig.’ ‘I’ll be the warrior.’ ‘I’ll be the one.’ I’m going into it with the consciousness that what I’m hearing is correct.

“Will there be mistakes made? Absolutely—because we are human beings. I’m observing because that has to be a part of it—because there’s evidence in the world. And that’s what I lean towards. There’s evidence in the world of the advances that had to happen, and there were people that were sacrificed because [the advances] didn’t happen fast enough.”

The Reentry Success Center and The Reentry Network continue to be available to meet with justice-impacted individuals and their families to explore what supports are available. In-custody and reentry services also continue to be impacted by this outbreak. Men and women awaiting release and in need of supportive services should send an inmate request through the Adult School to Game Plan for Success. They will connect you to the Reentry Success Center or The Reentry Network.

not financially ready to say I’m on my feet yet.

“Just take things one step at a time. Don’t be in a hurry to do nothing. Just be patient, take your time, and let people that you are dealing with deal according to the right way to deal. Just take your time. Don’t rush. I took my time for a year. I got out of prison July 1, 2021. On July 1, 2022, I’m no longer on parole. It’s awesome to give that number back to people. I’m just waiting for my discharge card.

“I had to see my son in a casket on Zoom while I was in prison. He died April 9, 2021. I got out of prison July 1, 2021. I couldn’t see my son and daughter pick me up—just my daughter. He would’ve been 27 [years old]. I lost something big, but I was still strong for those months I was waiting to come home. I didn’t do nothing goofy to get to stay there, and I came home. So here I am today.”

REMEDY: Filling Critical Health Care Gaps

Gaps in medical services exist both for people who are locked up and for people who are on the outside. Far less attention, however, is given to individuals who are locked up, let alone those who require life-saving medical treatments while also serving time. As Vernon said in his reentry profile (in this issue), “It was terrible. I was getting tired. I was fatigued. A lot of stuff was happening. I was, like, ‘Why? Why is this happening?’”

Tiombe Mashama, program coordinator for Contra Costa County Health Services’ Re-entry Health Conductors program, understands health gaps all too well. She has been working to address them throughout the county, and beyond, for well over a decade.

In 2011, Mashama found herself serving as a liaison between the City of Richmond and the county health department during a period of uncontrolled gun violence. Along with Devone Boggan of Richmond’s Office of Neighborhood Safety, she focused on providing one of life’s basic supports—health care—back when the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act was just getting underway.

“[Devone] had created a program, and it was like a life map,” Mashama said. “On the life map was a lot of different things that weren’t dealt with in [people’s lives], which put them at risk of being violent. Health was on the map.”

While Mashama and Boggan found themselves in a unique position to effect positive change, it took a few more years for all the pieces to come together. They noticed, for instance, that patients coming to receive care didn’t want to wait around.

“Their experience inside, or behind the wall, created a kind of health care that was not health care,” Mashama said. “It didn’t feel safe many times, and it would be just sitting in the waiting room. It didn’t feel authentic for them to just

trust that the process was going to be smooth and easy.”

Rather than dismiss that criticism, the Re-entry Health Conductors sought more knowledge and expertise from the community itself. Mashama was quick to point out that justice-impacted members helped come up with the name of their support group, REMEDY: Re-entry Makes Every Day Yours.

WHAT IS REMEDY?

The REMEDY Support Group Network provides a safe place for all people returning from incarceration. It helps justice-impacted individuals begin

Their experience inside created a kind of health care that was not health care. It didn’t feel safe. It didn’t feel authentic for them to just trust that the process was going to be smooth and easy.

the process of working through their past behaviors to develop more positive and life-affirming ones. It also aims to reduce recidivism.

County health staff achieve the network’s goals by reaching out to the reentry community, conducting brief screenings, and assisting with enrollment in public benefits, such as health coverage. They also assist justice-impacted individuals with scheduling medical appointments and linking to other essential resources.

“There is genius among us,” Mashama said. “It’s among the community.”

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

REMEDY is open to individuals 18 years and older on AB 109, federal, or state probation and parole, who have chronic disease and reside in Contra Costa County. Insurance coverage is not required. Individuals who are uninsured will receive assistance with applying for health coverage.

Those accepted into REMEDY must complete a 14-week course that addresses health, employment, housing, and other needs in order to reintegrate back into the community. Completion of the 14-week course provides access to the REMEDY Support Group Network and opportunities to offer and receive peer leadership, advocacy, and mentoring training to others in the group.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Over the 14-week course, the group meets twice a month in both West County and East County. Meetings are held in the evening, from 5:00-7:30 pm, and are co-facilitated by those with lived experience.

Meetings invite members to:

- build cognitive behavioral skills;
- developing new and increased coping skills;
- identify and understand the difference between what is useful and what is no longer effective in life’s habits;
- increase awareness of the ability to transition, sustain and be productive in society;
- increase knowledge and awareness of effective communication;
- increase awareness and knowledge of chronic disease, such as diabetes, chronic asthma, hypertension, chronic pain, and heart disease;
- increase health literacy and understanding of how to access and navigate the health care system and community programs.

For more information and to get started, call (510) 231-9400 in West County or (800) 495-8885 in East County.

KELLY, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

small things. Look at the small things you’re doing, like turning the lights on and off for yourself and putting your own underwear on. Appreciate things like that, and defend that. Defend, you know, being able to put on your own underwear and not sharing that with 5,000 inmates. Know that you’re gonna make it all right. You’re gonna make the right decision, the best move for you. The patience, it goes hand in hand with looking at the little things that you’re able to do that were taken away from you. It’ll help you with having patience. Some people get out and they forget that. I enjoy wearing my own underwear.

“I’ll tell you a funny story. I did a violation. I did 10 months flat. I went to San Quentin for possession of marijuana. So, I had some marijuana, right? And I had a couple cell phones. I didn’t have nothing major, maybe \$800 to \$1,000 in cash. When I go to the board, they say that, since I got two cell phones and I had a thousand dollars in my pocket, I got hit with a possession of marijuana, which gave me 10 months flat—two months shy of a year.

“I did the 10 months, I did my time. I got out, and I was at my grandma’s house. I was in the shower and, you know, it just hit me: I had a revelation. I said, ‘Man, I could take my underwear off because

I’m at home.’ I was institutionalized, because I was in my own home with nobody around and I still had my underwear on in the shower. Like, I’m around a lot of people looking at me. I had to get out of that mind state of jail. I had to reverse what it had done to me. So, those experiences tell me to appreciate the little things that I lose by putting myself in those situations where I’m risking my freedom. That’s power you give up when you get in the institutions.

“I only had, maybe, a gram of weed, but I was on parole. They said I was living above my means, because of the two cell phones and a thousand dollars. My rent was \$1,500 back then. I told them, ‘This is my rent money.’ I was living in Concord with my girlfriend. I lived in those apartments, and it was expensive even back then.

“When you go to the board, you don’t get a lawyer or nothing. Once the person in charge feels, like, ‘You had some weed, you had some money, and you had two phones? You’re out there dealing.’ There’s nothing I could really do, but accept the time, you know?

Asked if he thinks times have changed, Kelly said, “Yes, times have definitely changed. Weed is legal now, and times have changed for good and for bad. The good thing is that they do help you with your mental health a little more these days.


As long as you’re not doing nothing violent, you get half time in the county [sometimes], depending on what you do. It’s still a trap. The bad thing about it is that it’s a business and they don’t look at you as an individual. They look at you as a business opportunity. Whether it’s housing you in the jail or having you on probation, it’s just a business to them. There’s really no reform unless you want to do it yourself.

“I don’t really have time to waste in my life. I stunted my growth a little bit. I had some setbacks. I had some time taken away from my life, and I really want to make my life meaningful and I don’t want to waste no time. I don’t want to face any more setbacks. I gotta quit playing. I gotta stay on the right track.


“As I started doing better things, I started getting better and I wanted to keep it that way. I wanted to keep the good karma, the good juju. I want to share with the readers to keep a positive mindset and keep a positive outlook on your situation, no matter how bad it may be, because we have the power to change things. That’s what we’re here for: It’s to make things better or to how we want it. Stay positive and make plans. Plan out your situation and stick to your plans. Stick to your goals.”


EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)


Women's Group 
5:30-7:30pm, safe space open to women for engaging conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center, through the Zoom videoconferencing app, <https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

TUESDAYS (ONGOING)


California Reinvestment Grant Groups 
10:30-11:45am, substance use disorder relapse prevention, motivational interviewing, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)






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> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

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> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

Mental Health Group 
10:30-11:45am, part of the county's Integrated Cognitive Behavior Change Program, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)

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> (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

OTHER

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:



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

"A Center," by Ha Jin

You must hold your quiet center,
where you do what only you can do.
If others call you a maniac or a fool,
just let them wag their tongues.
If some praise your perseverance,
don't feel too happy about it—
only solitude is a lasting friend.

You must hold your distant center.
Don't move even if earth and heaven quake.
If others think you are insignificant,
that's because you haven't held on long enough.
As long as you stay put year after year,
eventually you will find a world
beginning to revolve around you.

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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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