Contra Costa Reentry

Issue 20 / 2023

REENTRY PROFILE



Hailing from Southern California, Tiffany is a mother of two kids and serves as the interim site manager of the Reentry Success Center:

"I relocated to the Bay Area over a decade ago. I definitely feel like this is home. Whenever I go down to the southern region and then come back, it always feels good to like be back home here in the Bay.

"I enjoy the outdoors. I love helping others—I always have from a very young age. I've just enjoyed helping people. Luckily enough, through my early adulthood, I found who I like to help and with what. I definitely love being a part of the community and getting involved. I also consider myself an advocate for reentry and marginalized communities. I'm big on any type of social injustice and on women's rights.

"My mother and father both served time in prison, from when I was an infant and toddler to basically my whole childhood and even early adulthood. I was raised by my grandmother, a very strong, loving woman, until I got to adolescence. And then I found myself in my community, which is a lot like Richmond—very diverse. I found myself wanting to be in the streets than at home with my grandmother, because I found a lot more people like me, like my parents.

"Back then, there were no reentry services. I was always wanting a typical household of a mother, father, children, and not having it. It was very natural for me to identify with other individuals in my community out in the street, who also came from broken families.

"From there, I've just always been open to helping others and loving others the way my grandmother and my community did for me. From my own experiences—from when I was a juvenile to early adulthood, becoming intertwined with the criminal justice system, until I became a mother—I realized that I didn't want that same cycle, that same generational curse of reentry. Having my children away from me wasn't an option because I know how that impacted me as a child, even though I really loved my grandmother and I didn't go without.

"I loved being outside and in the streets once I got to a certain age. I think that's how I relate to the community members so well, because it looks a lot like my community. From a very young age, I grew up learning these values and skills and qualities, and also wanting to help others and connect with others because I was missing the connection with my own parents. By the time I was an adult and a mother, since I wasn't willing to separate myself or let a system raise my children, I decided to change.

"I really had to open my mind to learning new things and a new way of living life—not the way I had learned in my community or the way I had seen my mother or my father carry out their adulthood or their livelihoods. After bumping my head a few times and still being open to change, I finally started seeing success and light. From there, I was not willing to go back to a fixed mindset or old life CONTINUES ON PAGE 3





Remember Loved Ones

Everyone grieved the passing of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. To commemorate them, we will list their names, and any related art or photos you share, in our future issue (Issue 21).

Thanks to all who already sent in the names of loved ones. We are still taking submissions.

Submit names by inmate request through the Adult School Game Plan for Success. Or write us at one of the addresses on the back of this issue.

SUBMISSION EXAMPLE

Name (or Nickname) of Person Being Commemorated:

Ofelia "Ofie" Gutierrez

Their Date of Birth and Date of Death (Optional):

January 1946 - October 2020

Including anything else?

Yes! She was an AMAZING baker, so

I'm including a drawing of her flan.

EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers,

Our county partner Centerforce offered us something to think about: When a member of the community is incarcerated, the entire community suffers. The way those words take aim, fly, and then settle in our hearts means they are true. We have lived through countless lived examples.

For so long, the answers came loudest from so-called experts—those who studied justice but never lived it, breathed it, and transformed it into something new, something beautiful.

This issue, our 20th, spotlights real stories that, as Tiffany said in her interview, are hard-won victories. They are the result of trying to change for the first time or the second time, or even the third or fourth time. We know our past. We also possess the knowledge to heal the community.

Charmaine Hoggatt The Reentry Network



Pat Mims **Reentry Success Center**

P.S. Not on our mailing list? Write and let us know where to send copies to you.

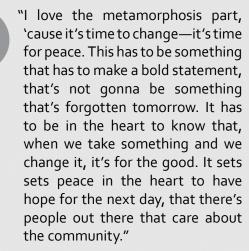
Art of Peace Richmond: Welding Change

Artists Curtis and Mike, members of the Reentry Success Center's Restorative Arts program, discuss the sculpture they created in partnership with Vallejo-based Robby Poblete Foundation. The foundation was created in 2014 in honor of Pati Navalta Poblete's son, Robby, who was killed by gun violence. The foundation provided parts from its gun buyback program, and Curtis and Mike transformed those parts into art.



"This is an abstract representation of an hourglass and a tree. You're looking at the leaves of the tree and they turn into the growth and the roots, and develops the city itself.

"You're looking at this from the East Side—this is the East Side of the city and the base of Richmond, California. We incorporated the Iron Triangle, and we created the railroad tracks also. And the Reentry Success Center. Everything is geographically aligned."





"There's technique, there's timing, and everything has to be right for it to hold together. That's how it is with art: everything has to be in the right spot to hold together, to be able to see the picture.

"I got a lot of work to do with myself. Through this change, I gotta continue to be peaceful. I have to continue to be the man that I want be. There's a lot of work that's inside that for me to put my selfishness aside. Work with the community. By working with the community, I mean by not being a hindrance to the community, but somebody who is there for the community, to help the community, to build community, to be somebody who's ready to help the next person instead of passing them."



"I didn't know how to weld. The first two days I couldn't even see through the mask. It took two sessions before I really knew how to make things stick. Then I became addicted to it, to this. And so it really became fun.

"I learned that could overcome pretty much any obstacle, if I choose to do it."



"I have to trust the process. I can't be always right. I always thought I was in control of my life and I knew what I wanted, and nobody could tell me anything different. Ever since I learned to trust the process, things have always worked out."

TIFFANY, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

patterns and behaviors that were kind of given to me by my parents and my community, and having just any job I could get to provide for my children.

"I got out of high school, took on a trade, and did medical assisting. I did that for a little bit, and I really enjoyed it because I was helping people, particularly people coming into health care, where you expect a quality of service when you're receiving care. However, it was really hard to find jobs; with my background, it would have to be a private doctor or small practice. I was almost completely locked out of what I went to school for, so I started working in community service.

"I started looking for opportunities when I was pregnant with my second child. That's what brought me to the Bay Area. When I had first gotten out here, I was working at a job center. I was helping individuals search for employment. Then I found an opportunity to get specifically into reentry. It was pivotal. It opened the doors for me to get back into some fulfilling, meaningful work—of helping individuals who need the support. I'm willing to go above and beyond to provide it."

Tiffany describes herself as resilient, "but I think it's more like 'determined.' No matter what phase or season that I go through in life, the determination is always there. Sometimes I'll be lacking motivation, but I'm never willing to settle or just give up, even if it doesn't turn out the way I want it to. All of my hard times never lasted, even when it felt like I didn't know how I was going to get beyond that point, due to my determination and not willing to just stop or give up. I'm still on my path, so I'm still determined to go further and, hopefully, pave that path for those behind me."

"Understanding the struggle and also knowing that there are a lot of struggles greater than mine" are what have been most helpful, Tiffany said. "Not everyone is as fortunate to have had a grandmother like me or have that thing that they're not willing to do or continue, as far as generational traumas or curses go. Just for me, being able to understand the struggle opens my mind to meeting individuals where they're at and just lifting them up, even when it doesn't make sense or I don't understand—allowing them the space. Providing that hope or that

support. Not having my mother and my father for those things where I could really use them cheering me on or condoling with me. I know what it's like to lack support and community, so having even one person who believes in you, or telling you, 'Okay,' or just listening to you, can be so important. Not having to carry that weight by yourself.

"I definitely feel the weight. I definitely feel the weight of the barriers that society has put in place for our community. It's going to take community and community stakeholders to lift up the weight, so that we and the rest of our community members don't feel it."

Tiffany continued by saying that she is motivated by "daily interactions, whether it be with our members or with staff. Being able to hear what other individuals are dealing with or striving

Sometimes I'll be lacking motivation, but I'm never willing to settle or just give up, even if it doesn't turn out the way I want it to.

towards. It allows me to put what I think is big or heavy to the side, just to deal with whatever may come in through the doors at any given time. Whether it be a member or staff. It definitely gives me that energy and that feeling to keep going."

"Come back into the community with an open mind and have lots of self-forgiveness and gratitude," Tiffany said. "Be kind to yourself and count what you have versus what you don't have. Create a plan to get what you don't currently have [like housing and peer supports]. It's okay to not get it right the first, second, or third time. There are places like the Reentry Success Center that will work with you and support you when you don't get it right the first time or the second time, or even the third or fourth time.

"When we're too hard on ourselves, when things don't work out the way we planned, just getting back up and starting over or realigning to a new plan [can be a challenge]. There are resources available to support those plans. Lean on the support and don't try to carry it all alone."

Since May 1, Tiffany has been serving as the Reentry Success Center's interim site manager. Every day she said she relies on "my own experiences wanting to give others that unconditional support and positive regard; becoming lead [reentry coach] and having the opportunity to lead others and push the team to strive to provide that same quality of service; and being able to lead and support the leadership of the Center. It definitely feels different. I'm honored to take up this huge responsibility.

"It's definitely a commitment to the community, and I don't take the opportunity lightly Anyone who walks through those doors continues to receive unconditional positive regard and support, no matter where they're at in their journey of reentry. Whether they're returning from an institution or coming off the streets or a lifestyle, just knowing that someone will be here, ready and waiting, eager to meet them.

"I've always asked myself, 'Why do you like helping people so much?' I don't know if it's the unconditional love that my grandmother showed me that I have to give to other people. I had to grow up fast, and I've always taken care of everyone's kids or even my parents. I feel like they're like my children to this day. They still call me and ask, 'What do I do?'

"I supported them before I even knew reentry was a thing. Like, 'Go here,' 'Apply here,' 'Do this.' Because I had already been trying to reenter—not so much reenter, but just tired of being rejected constantly from job to job because of my past. I also just wanted to provide for my family and contribute to society—just enough to where we can at least have the essentials.

"I know how important it can be, after being rejected so many times. It can get discouraging. That's how individuals very easily fall back onto surviving the way they know how, in these marginalized communities. It's reassuring and refreshing to know that there is a place like the Reentry Success Center for individuals to return to."

PROGRAMS

Centerforce: Building Better Lives

Centerforce was founded in 1977 to offer housing to people visiting loved ones at San Quentin State Prison. Since then, it has gone on to provide many other services during incarceration, reentry, and after release. Centerforce's philosophy is that when a member of the community is incarcerated, the entire community suffers. Therefore, the community works together to improve the lives of members affected by the justice system, and the lives of their families—because it's the right thing to do.

In Contra Costa County, Centerforce provides two key services. First, it coordinates WEST, short for Women Establishing Success Together, an alcohol and other drugs treatment program available to justice-impacted women for up to one year after their release. Second, it provides family reunification workshops that engage participants in resolving conflict, promoting healthy

interactions, and rebuilding relationships.

"Centerforce has done an excellent job of offering support, guidance, and transitional planning for currently and formerly incarcerated women returning to Central and East county," said Charmaine Hoggatt, managing director at HealthRIGHT 360, which has been partnering with Centerforce for the past five years. "Our collaboration has helped many women to transition successfully back into the community."

Cynthia Zabala, Centerforce program manager and lead for family reunification services in Contra Costa County, said Centerforce "rocks" in its extensive case management, including assisting justice-impacted members with navigating the justice system, establishing visitation, resolving child support (through its connection to Child Support Services), and even getting drivers' licenses released.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread protests that took place across the nation over police brutality and social injustices, Centerforce strengthened its commitment to serving individuals, families, and communities impacted by incarceration. Today, Centerforce's staff remains connected with members of the

justice-impacted community as they struggle to cope with the traumatizing effects resulting from some of the most important issues of the world today.

"I have been working very hard to become closer to my daughter since I have been home," said John, a justice-impacted member, on the Centerforce website. "The Centerforce events we attended helped to strengthen that bond. We laughed, we played, and best of all we talked. I hope that Centerforce will continue to be able to afford these opportunities for other individuals and their families."

Centerforce's Zabala said staff are able to get things done because they have lived experience. She also said that she understands that, for justice-impacted individuals recently released from jail or prison, what's top of mind is simply a soft place to land.

For more information on WEST and family reunification services, submit an inmate request through the Adult School Game Plan for Success. You can also contact Centerforce's Cynthia Zabala regarding family reunification services at (510) 593-4222 and Annette Corriveau, Centerforce case manager and lead on the WEST program, at (844) 819-9840.

EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Women's Group 🚱

5:30-7:30pm, open to women interested in conversations related to everyday life, in-person at the Reentry Success Center and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

TUESDAYS (ONGOING)

California Reinvestment Grant Groups

10:30-11:45am, focusing on substance use disorder relapse prevention, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)

WEDNESDAYS (ONGOING)

Restorative Practices: Arts Class

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members and drop-ins, in-person at the Reentry Success Center and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

California Reinvestment Grant Groups

10:30-11:45am, focusing on substance use disorder relapse prevention, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 (Call 925-732-1357 for details)

Restorative Circles 🕒 🗐 🤀 🥪 🖎 5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members,

and drop-ins, in-person at the Reentry Success Center and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, https://rubiconprograms.zoom.us (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

FRIDAYS (ONGOING)

Forward Thinking Men's Group 🚱

5:30-7:30pm, open to men interested in conversations related to everyday life, in-person at the Reentry Success Center and on the Zoom videoconferencing app, https://rubiconprograms. zoom.us (Call 800-816-4453 for details)

OTHER

Community Green Space Clean-Up

10:00am-2:00pm, open to all, every third Saturday of the month, in-person across the street from the Reentry Success Center

Mobile Resource App 🕒 🕥 🞧 👪 🔇



Listing of support services accessible 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

"Riot," by Tracy K. Smith

We live— We live in my city and yours and on far shores nationless We live—

We live standing risen on solid authority in the light and not quietly We live—

morning sun We live evening come We live generations hence We liveWe live deep color our heart leaps We live over and again our heart leaps

We live gold hot bright the line of us never tiring We live— We live—

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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Contra Costa Reentry VOICE is published quarterly by the following organizations:



Reentry Success Center 912 Macdonald Avenue Richmond, CA 94801 reentrysuccess.org



Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360 5119 Lone Tree Way Antioch, CA 94531 healthRIGHT36o.org



Contra Costa County 30 Muir Road Martinez, CA 94553 co.contra-costa.ca.us 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



Family



Financial

Employment



Benefits



Legal

Health

