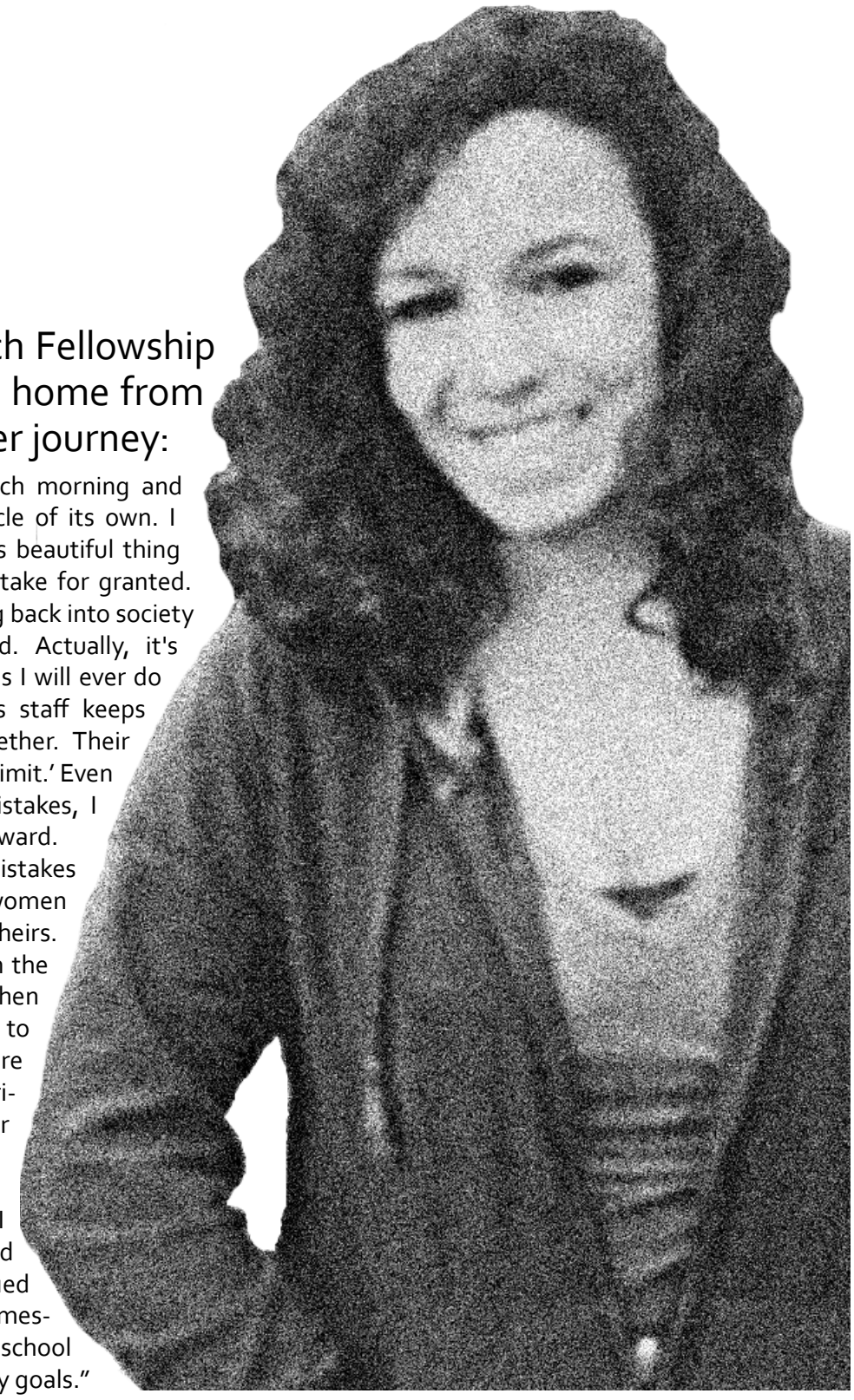
Contra Costa Reentry

VOICE

Spring 2018

REENTRY PROFILE

Lauren Rodriguez is 28 years old and lives at Reach Fellowship International's Naomi House for women returning home from incarceration with their children. She reflects on her journey:



"For the past three years, I have been in and out of custody at the West County Detention Facility. It was there where I first learned about Reach Fellowship International, an agency that gives weekly programming for women at the facility. I was really inspired by their program, and I told them I would love to be a part of their program on the outside. But, every time I got released, I always fell back into my old habits of drugs and crime.

"Two months ago, during my last stint at the facility, I felt more determined to change. I made the commitment to be released under Reach's Naomi House Residential Program. When I finally got released and walked out of those glass doors, for the first time ever I truly felt a sense of happiness and hope. It just wasn't there before. The difference between this time and all the other times was that someone was waiting for me on the other side of those heavy glass doors.

"Her name is Belinda, and she works for Reach. She had the biggest smile. I just embraced her and instantly I knew this time was going to be different. Instead of worrying what I was going to do and how I was going to start all over again—with just the clothes on my back and myself—this time I had someone who was there waiting to help me get to where I need to be.

"To be honest, the fact that I still have my life and get to wake up each morning and take a breath is a miracle of its own. I don't want to waste this beautiful thing that, sadly, many of us take for granted. It's not easy transitioning back into society after being incarcerated. Actually, it's one of the hardest things I will ever do in my life. But, Reach's staff keeps us women sticking together. Their motto is: 'The sky is the limit.' Even though I have made mistakes, I will continue to press forward.

"I plan to turn my mistakes into hope, for other women who may have lost all of theirs. And I want to give them the strength they need, when they have none. Thanks to Reach, I'm in a place where I can use my life experience to help others. Their staff have been my life-savers.

"In two months, I have grown by leaps and bounds. I have reunified with my family. Next semester, I'll be going back to school to continue to achieve my goals."

REENTRY Q&A

Lance Hamlett recently became a member of Richmond's Reentry Success Center, one of the two publishers of this publication. Dameion King, the center's reentry coach, spoke with Mr. Hamlett about change and sought his advice for others planning their journey home.

If you could describe yourself in one word, what would it be?
I'm changeable. And I'm a positive person.

What's been most helpful to you after reentry?
What's been most helpful...I've been around positive people, and they've told me nothing but good things. They've told me they'll help, and there are things that will happen.

Reentry takes time. Without patience, you won't go anywhere. If you don't change, then you'll get the same results—lock and key. But if you change, then you'll have a fifty-fifty chance of moving forward in your life.

What would you say to a loved one who is about to reenter society?
I would let them see the progress I've made. I would tell them it's positive. I'm making it, and I just left where they just came from.

What were your fears about reentry?
My thoughts—that I needed to work. My biggest fear was not having a job. Now that I'm in a position, through Reentry's help, I'm able to move forward and take this step in my life. I can keep myself from being incarcerated. I have responsibilities to pay rent, bills, and everything else.

How important is it to trust yourself?
It's important. As long as my thoughts are positive, I stay as my own role model. I'm an example that successful reentry can be done—when you're willing to do the right thing. You can't straddle the fence. You have to decide before you leave the institution what you're going to do. Because the real test is when you come home—the reality of what you'll face.

It's easy to go backwards. If you go backwards, what will happen? Eventually, you'll go to jail. If you work for success, and take your time, and have patience, and have family and friends that love you, you'll get more support and more help—if you show them that you really want is what you talked about while you were under lock and key. Now is the time to execute it.

Thank you.

EDITORS' NOTES

Spring marks the beginning—of new ideas, habits, and life choices. Our third issue spotlights all that spring has to offer, from inspirational stories of change and determination to reentry programs and services available throughout the county. They, and we, exist to help you get back on your feet so you can move them forward.

On the topic of moving forward, we're already planning our summer issue. If you have stories you would like us to share, art and poetry you would like us to showcase, or ideas you would like to propose, please write us at Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Avenue, Richmond, CA 94801, or at Reentry Network at HealthRight 360, 5119 Lone Tree Way, Antioch, CA 94531. Please include "Reentry Communications" in your submission.

We hope you enjoy the stories in this issue.

Nicholas Alexander
Reentry Success Center

Patrice Guillory
The Reentry Network

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

PROGRAMS

SHELTER, Inc.: Helping People Cover Basic Needs

In his interview, Contra Costa resident Lance Hamlett said his biggest fear was not having a job to pay for basic necessities, like rent. Fortunately, organizations like SHELTER, Inc. serve families and individuals to keep them from becoming homeless.

Since 1986, SHELTER, Inc. has been offering services, support, and resources that promote self-sufficiency. The organization owns and operates housing properties throughout Contra Costa County, including an emergency family shelter in Martinez.

The Mountain View Emergency Family Shelter in Martinez gets homeless families with children off the streets and into a safe temporary home. The shelter takes families who agree to meet regularly with a case manager. The case manager then helps the families find stable housing, as well as schools, jobs, and mental health services. Ninety percent of families that stay at Mountain View Emergency Family Shelter move to stable housing.

SHELTER, Inc. also provides rapid rehousing: rental assistance combined with services to help homeless families and individuals overcome the challenges and barriers that led them to homelessness. It provides:

Since 1986, SHELTER, Inc. has been offering services, support, and resources that promote self-sufficiency.

Employment Assistance: SHELTER, Inc. offers one-on-one career development, job readiness, job placement, and retention services to individuals in its transitional and permanent housing programs. The organization also offers job search and career coaching workshops, transportation assistance, uniforms, and trainings and certifications.

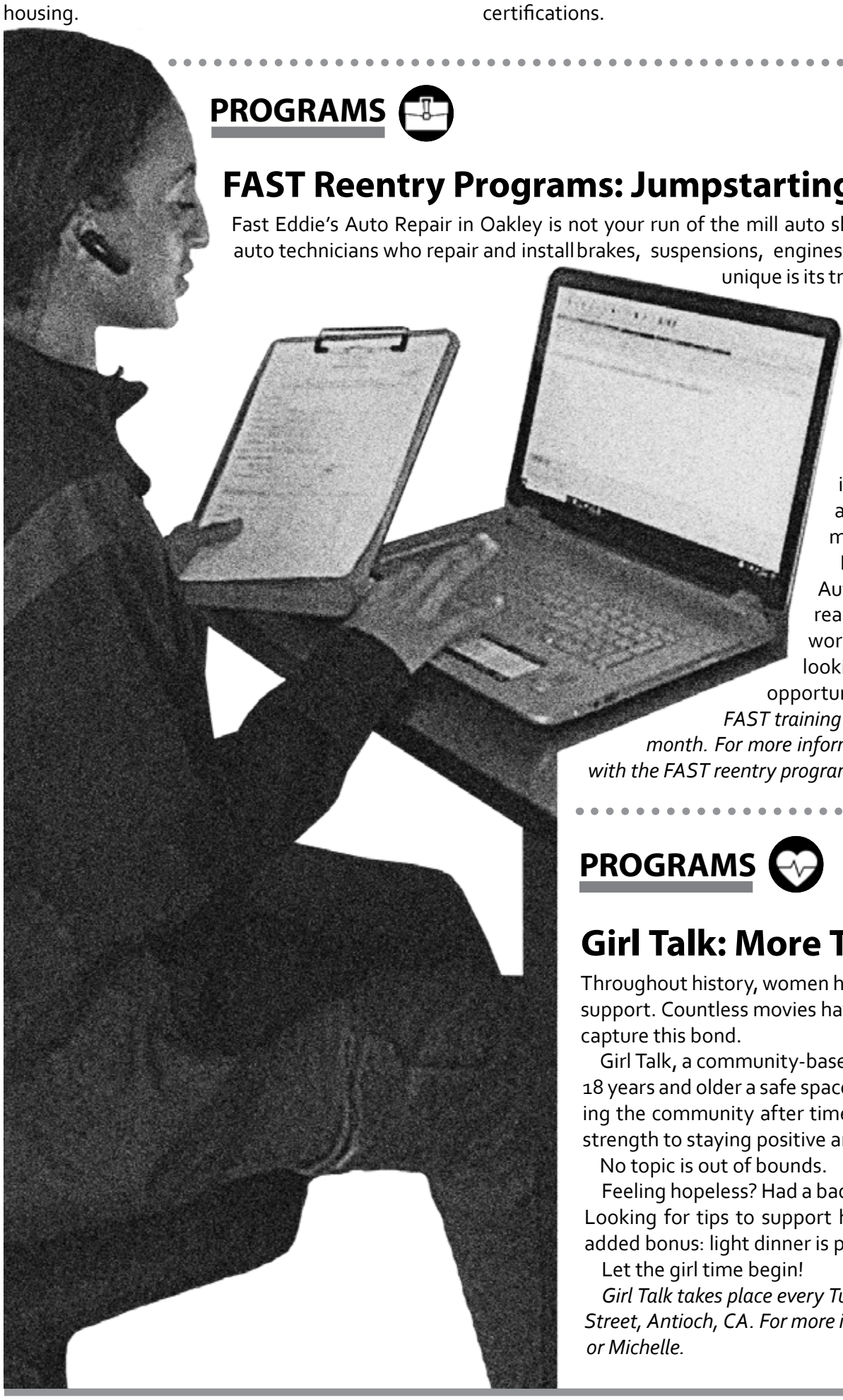
Tutoring: Credentialed teachers offer one-on-one mentoring and support for adults and children living at Mountain View Emergency Family Shelter.

Counseling: SHELTER, Inc. partners with another organization called the Counseling Option and Parenting Education (COPE) Family Support Center to offer various mental health services, such as assessments and therapy.

Parenting Classes: Several times a year, SHELTER, Inc. offers a Positive Parenting Program class to individual in its residential program, to promote healthy relationships between parents and their children.

Nutrition Classes: SHELTER, Inc. partners with another organization called Leah's Pantry to offer family nutrition workshops to families. The workshops spotlight healthy cooking lessons and information on why healthy, nutritious meals are important.

For more information and to apply for assistance, please call (925) 338-1038, Monday to Friday, between the hours of 9 am and 4 pm.



PROGRAMS

FAST Reentry Programs: Jumpstarting Automotive Careers

Fast Eddie's Auto Repair in Oakley is not your run of the mill auto shop. It offers services one finds in most shops, such as skilled auto technicians who repair and install brakes, suspensions, engines, and transmissions. What makes Fast Eddie's Auto Repair unique is its training program, in partnership with Brentwood's Liberty Adult Training Center and the Contra Costa Reentry Network.

Fast Eddie's hosts FAST reentry programs, offering vocational services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. FAST's four-week training course covers the ins and outs of how to become a lube technician, brake technician, or service writer. Students learn about customer service, safety, products, and other services. They are taught in small, intimate classes with small student to teacher ratios. Students are also mentored in an encouraging and supportive environment.

In her review, customer Lanita Mims writes that Fast Eddie's Auto Repair is the "Best Mechanic on this side of Heaven! He really takes good care of all my cars." If you're passionate about working with your hands to build, repair, or maintain, or you're looking to advance your automotive skills, FAST may be the perfect opportunity for you.

FAST training orientations are held every second and fourth Wednesday of the month. For more information or to register, please call 925-634-2562, and ask to speak with the FAST reentry programs program manager.

PROGRAMS

Girl Talk: More Than Idle Chatter

Throughout history, women have turned to one another for friendship, advice, guidance, and support. Countless movies have been made, and even more books have been written, which capture this bond.

Girl Talk, a community-based group hosted by Antioch's Rubicon Programs, offers women 18 years and older a safe space to share what's in their hearts and minds. For women reentering the community after time in prison, it can also serve as a place to receive support and strength to staying positive and maintaining accountability.

No topic is out of bounds.

Feeling hopeless? Had a bad day at work? Need a break from the spouse, the kids, or both? Looking for tips to support healthier eating habits? Girl Talk has you covered. There's an added bonus: light dinner is provided.

Let the girl time begin!

Girl Talk takes place every Tuesday, from 5:30pm to 7:30pm at Rubicon Programs, 418 W. 4th Street, Antioch, CA. For more information, please call 925-399-8990, and ask for Melissa, Alicia or Michelle.

HOW TO

Bounce Back and Get Your Life on Track

Preparing for release from jail or prison can stir a lot of emotions. Having a fresh start may offer feelings of relief, but it can also stir fear and anxiety about returning to tough circumstances, such as family life, finding work, finding safe housing, and staying clean and sober.

After release, it can be tempting to return to old behaviors that were not always positive--they were just enough to get by. You may be asking, "How can someone like me overcome these challenges?"

Here are some ideas to help get you started, which you can repeat as often as you need them.

Stay Positive, Find Hope, and Believe in Yourself

When you change your thoughts, you change your life. Though this alone won't solve all your problems, it is important. By staying positive about the changes you can make (despite past mistakes) and being hopeful about the future, you can begin to focus on your inner strength to overcome such challenges. Believe in yourself. Embrace the idea that you are someone who is alive and worthy of love. You have to know deep down that you are capable of succeeding and, with a little help, can conquer the difficulties you may face at home and achieve the healthy life you want to live.

Create a Goal

Who are you? Who do you want to be? Who are you becoming? What do you want to achieve in your life? Why are those things important to you? What's most important to you?

Perhaps you always had some idea of who you wanted to be, but just never had a chance to work toward it. Perhaps you never thought about who you'd become because you were just trying to get by. What better time than now to imagine what the next phase of your life could be, and moving towards your goal.

Find Support and Stay Connected

Thinking positively and letting go of old patterns in your life is hard work. It requires courage and commitment. Once you make the effort, you'll want to find people who will support you. Consider finding people who could mentor and encourage you, and help you get connected to the resources you need to reach your goal.

Your support system doesn't have to be limited to friends and family, although that's a great place to start. You can also find support in local Twelve Step programs (such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous), the faith community, and organizations that offer reentry services. If you need help building a positive support system, please write to us and we'll help you find positive connections to people in the community who are open to supporting you.

Once you find your support, it's important to stay connected. When you make progress—by working again, having your own place, and having everything in your life feeling upbeat – stay connected. When your life appears to be turning for the worst, stay connected. Having a strong support system means you'll increase your chances of going through life feeling less alone and disconnected from the rest of the world. We all have trials we go through, and none of us can overcome them alone. Be honest with yourself about the help you need, and stay connected.

Follow Up and Follow Through

Your word is your bond. It rings true in the streets and in the board room. It requires integrity. What is integrity? Integrity is defined as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles." It's the quality of being honest.

It's not enough to commit to doing something, only to later not follow through with it. If you accept a job and not show up to work without calling in, it's dishonest and lacking in integrity. You may be asking, "What if I really can't do the job or follow through on the commitments I once thought I could do?"

Being honest with yourself and others, and being open to talking about any changes you may be experiencing, is a good way of addressing what you can and cannot do. It's called knowing your limits. We all have them. The key to having and keeping your integrity is by following through with what you say you'll do. If you can't do it, be honest by following up and letting others know your limitations.

Take It One Day at a Time

Life after jail or prison will have its ups and downs. The important thing to remember is to take it one day at a time. If that seems too difficult, take things one step at a time. Change takes time.

Did you know it takes at least 21 days of consistently doing a new thing in order to replace an old habit? In some cases, the time is even longer. Consider viewing your life is a marathon. You have to pace yourself and be consistent, in order to get to the finish line. You may come across some hurdles here and there, and that's okay. You can overcome them. You may also encounter successes along the way, and that's okay too. Stay encouraged and keep moving forward.

DID YOU KNOW

Being Convicted of a Crime Does Not Ban You from Public Housing

Public Housing Authorities determine many of their admissions and occupancy policies for ex-offenders. While Public Housing Authorities can choose to ban ex-offenders from participating in public housing and Section 8 programs, it is not federal policy to do so. In many circumstances, formerly incarcerated people should not be denied access.

On January 5, 2011, former Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan, who served under former President Barack Obama, reminded reentry council members that "this is an Administration that believes in the importance of second chances." At HUD, he said, "Part of that support means helping ex-offenders gain access to one of the most fundamental building blocks of a stable life—a place to live."

There are only two convictions for which a Public Housing Authorities must prohibit admission. They are:

- If any member of the household is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a State sex offender registration program;
- If any household member has ever been convicted of drug-related criminal activity for manufacture or production of methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing.
- Public Housing Authorities must also prohibit admission of an applicant—for three years from the date of eviction—if a household member has been evicted from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity.

Public Housing Authorities must establish standards which prohibit admission if they determine that any household member is currently engaged in illegal use of a drug. Public Housing Authorities must also establish standards which prohibit admission if they determine that there is reasonable cause to believe that a household member's illegal drug use or a pattern of illegal drug use may threaten the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents.

In such cases, Public Housing Authorities retain their discretion to consider the circumstances. They may admit households if they determine that the evicted household member who engaged in drug-related criminal activity has successfully completed a supervised drug rehabilitation program, such as those supervised by drug courts, or that the circumstances leading to eviction no longer exist (24 CFR 5.854).

Public Housing Authorities must formally allow all applicants to appeal a denial for housing, giving the applicant an opportunity to present evidence of positive change since the time of incarceration.

Working within the boundaries of such regulations, many Public Housing Authorities have established admissions and occupancy policies that have promoted reuniting families in supportive communities and using stable housing as a platform for improving quality of life.

EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Bridges to Work
9-11am, job-readiness services, open to men and women in East and Central County, Goodwill Industries, 3350 Clayton Road, Suite 100, Concord

TUESDAYS (ONGOING)

Women's Support Group/Girl Talk
5:30-7:30pm, Rubicon Programs, 418 West 4th Street, Antioch

WEDNESDAYS (ONGOING)

Men's Support Group
5:30-7:30pm, Rubicon Programs, 418 West 4th Street, Antioch

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

LGBT Wellness Recovery Action Plan
1-2:15pm, free community workshop to develop skills to manage anxiety and stress, Rainbow Community Center, 2118 Willow Pass Road, Suite 500, Concord

FIRST & THIRD TUESDAY (ONGOING)

HIV/AIDS East County Support Group
Men and women, 18 and over, Community Presbyterian Church, 200 East Leland Road, Pittsburg

FIRST & THIRD TUESDAY (ONGOING)

Reentry Orientation
10am-12pm, employment, housing, health and other assistance, Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Ave, Richmond

FIRST & THIRD THURSDAY (ONGOING)

REMEDY Support Group
5-7:30pm, women and men, 18 and over, at risk for chronic illness, West County Health Clinic, 13601 San Pablo Ave, San Pablo

FIRST & THIRD FRIDAY (ONGOING)

Debtor's Rights Clinic
9:30am-1pm, debt collection lawsuit and harassment support, (first Friday) SparkPoint–Contra Costa West, 1000 Macdonald Ave, Richmond and (third Friday) SparkPoint–Contra Costa East, 3105 Willow Pass Road, Bay Point

SECOND & FOURTH TUESDAY (ONGOING)

REMEDY Support Group
5-7:30pm, women and men, 18 and over, at risk for chronic illness, Pittsburg Health Center, 2311 Loveridge Road, Pittsburg

EXPLORATIONS

We want to promote your artwork, photography, and poetry. *Please write us at info@reentrysuccess.org. Be sure to include "Reentry Newsletter Explorations" in the subject line. You can also send us regular mail. Our addresses are written below.*

POETRY

A poem by Poet-Inmates

I'm From

I'm from a family with no family,
Endless days with loneliness
Even when I got a crew—
I'm from a place I am now
That I could never wish for you,—
I'm from hunger literal and pain
Is real, from a place I can
No longer feel,
I'm from where you can't find trust,
I'm from where time don't matter—
When doing all this time is like
Climbin' up an endless ladder—
What's next to come you won't ever know
I'm from the only thing I do know
Is that I gotta keep my soul!

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.

CURRENT ISSUE

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ANSWERS TO WINTER 2017 ISSUE

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2	5	8	7	6	1	3	4	9
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5119 Lone Tree Way
Antioch, CA 94531
healthRIGHT360.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
Education
Health
Employment
Benefits
Legal