Contra Costa Reentry

VOICE

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Spring 2019

REENTRY PROFILE



In the Winter 2018 issue, Reentry Success Center Director Pat Mims began with his sentence of 20 years to life in state prison. In the second of two parts of his profile, Pat relates the importance of hope and finding one's own path to freedom:

"Before I knew it a year had passed since I had passed the GED. I was called to the counselor's office and was informed that I was about to transfer to a level III institution, because of my positive programming. I saw this as being a good thing because I would now have the opportunity to receive night yard privileges; however, I never imagined how much more this move would mean to me.

"As in all unfamiliar places I set my sights out on searching for something or someone familiar; yet, familiar to me had caution surrounded by it, as I wanted to continue on the path I had established at the last institution I was at. This meant searching for people with the same mindset. I wanted to find people who were making a difference in their own lives. It was clear to me that the people making a difference in their own lives exhibited having hope despite the circumstances. My first day, I found myself seeing and communicating with 'Lifers' I had seen years ago and wondered what had happened to them. I now realized that they too had dropped in points and were transferred as I had been. In this world, one must be careful with what he shares with another; everyone is not as hopeful as the next and some will work hard to derail positive activity out of spite alone. Now that I think about it, I only told two people I was leaving the level IV institution.

"I found someone who I had bonded with over basketball years ago and we greeted one another. I will never forget his first words to me were, 'You made it out of the death trap.' I said, 'Yes!' not realizing how true this statement was until I pondered on it later that night. I had survived one of the deadliest institutions in the State. I asked him what was going on where we were and he shared with me that there are numerous vocational programs, educational programs, self-help groups and prison industry, which I called slave labor. After attending a classification committee and an appointment with my counselor, I decided that I wanted to take the vocational electric trade. I chose this trade because I told myself that, when I get out, I need a skill that can help me support myself without having to commit crime because the old lifestyle was not an option. What caught me off guard was the statement I had made, 'When I get out.' It had never occurred to me before then that I would ever leave prison. Here I am, five years into a 20-to-life sentence and I am now talking about when I get out. I was surrounded by people who had been inside for well



over 20 years already and were hopeless of ever getting out. This brought me back to something my grandma always used to say: 'Someone else's journey is not your destiny.'

"Vocational electric was one of the most exciting experiences I had ever encountered at this point in my life. I was actually learning how houses ended up with electricity and how it moved throughout the house. I took this vocation seriously and studied hard for each test. While others were on the yard playing board games, exercising, and playing sports, I spent my time

I was angry; yet, I kept telling myself that anger is a healthy emotion, and I do not have to respond by acting out. I needed to make the best of it.

in the library or in my cell studying to become an electrician. Even though I was in prison I felt like I had a purpose. I ended up becoming a lead in the class and was the one who would respond to electrical problems within the vocational trades. I was charged with selecting a crew, all of the equipment necessary, and completing a work order when the job was finished. I remember telling the instructor, 'Please teach me just as it would be if I were on the streets.' He assured me that this course would obtain me an entry-level position. I was now thinking about work and the possibility of me becoming an actual electrician. I was now dreaming of becoming successful in a trade. Within three years I completed the vocational electric trade and received the certificates of completion along with some concerning news: I was being transferred once again. I was being sent into the mountains to a rural place that did not have a great deal of activity or programming.

After all of the gains I had made over the years, I felt as though I was now regressing on my journey. I was angry; yet, I kept telling myself that anger is a healthy emotion, and I do not have to respond by acting out. I needed to find the good in this move and make the best of it. For some strange reason, in the back of my mind, I knew that this would turn out to be a good thing.

"Starting new at every institution is pretty much the same: I immediately started searching for people with the same mindset. People that were on a path to positivity and were openly expressing their desires to one day return to society as productive members. I attended the classification and counselor meetings where I discovered that I would only make 30 cents an hour as an electrician. I passed on that opportunity as I felt as I was worth more **CONTINUES ON PAGE 3**

EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers,

As we come out of the wet winter season, it's only fitting that the stories in this issue are about spring in its many manifestations. There's a feeling about spring that is universal. It's almost as if every living being breathes a sigh of relief that the weather is finally getting progressively warmer. Trees are sprouting new leaves, buds are starting to blossom and bear flowers, and people such as ourselves are taking on life's challenges with renewed energy and interest. What you're holding in your hands is a collection of stories that we hope will help you to spring forward.

Pat

Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

Jatrice Guillory

The Reentry Network

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





Community Works West: Making Art with Heart

Deanne "Dee" Myer is part of the Healing Circles team at Community Works West, an organization that empowers people impacted by incarceration. As someone who sees the world through art, she values creativity on the path to liberation.

How did the Monday evening art class at Reentry Success Center get its start?

We had been working mostly inside [detention centers]. We have a reentry program in San Francisco and one at the office in Oakland. We had been doing restorative justice circles for the Reentry Success Center for the past two years. Pat (the center's director) mentioned wanting programming in the evenings, so we offered this, and they were really excited about it. We tried it out, and people just loved it. We've been doing it continuously for the past year.

What's your process?

It's an art-based class, but we start everything with a restorative justice circle. I introduce the group to restorative practices, and we have a circle.

In circle, we talk about all kinds of things. Restorative justice is based on identifying harm and being accountable for the consequences of that [harm], and seeking ways to repair it. We talk about storytelling—each person's life and their journeys.

When we have these circles, lots of really deep things come out for everybody. For me, since I'm more of a visual person, it's always been easier for me to express things in other forms than talking. Art kind of came naturally. And so I started doing art with the groups.

After circle, we sit down and translate some of those feelings into simple art projects.

I like to take all the pieces and put them together into a collaborative piece that can actually be displayed somewhere. And that's a further extension of the restorative process, where that expression goes out to the broader community, in the form of artwork.

In circle, we get to talk about the impact of the process with each person. As we sit around making art, we continue the conversation. To me, it has been a very organic process, where people get very comfortable with speaking their truth.

What's the story on the two pieces of art on the second floor of the Reentry Success Center?

Is that the mosaic? There was one person in

the group who had been in the Alpha program. She was taking photos of shadows of homeless people in her shelter. She was saying, "Look at how the posturing of a homeless person. Even in the shadow, you can see their stuff. You can see their bags and everything." They created these beautiful silhouettes.

I got the idea to photograph everyone and just do their silhouettes. They came out so proud and beautiful, regardless of what their status is—being homeless or in reentry. They were just beautiful portraits. We took those [silhouettes] and they filled them in with these mosaic pieces.

I had another Community Works circle keeper who happened to have been a tile artist. She's the one who helped us do the mosaic piece of it. It's

WHAT "RESTORATIVE JUSTICE" MEANS

Restorative Justice is used by many groups that work with men and women after their release from jail or prison.

Restorative means "having the power to bring back into use." Justice has many meanings, but it's safe to think of it as "aligning to an ideal or ideals."

At the Reentry Success Center and The Reentry Network, restorative justice in practice means services and programs that seek to bring back or renew one's sense of purpose in life and control over one's future.

Those services and programs are aligned with the ideal of making positive strides each and every day, while receiving support from one's community.

very meditative to find the right pieces. It helped everyone to slow down and focus.

When they saw their individual pieces, they were like, "Wow, this is something!" We put it all together. We used acrylic paint to paint the background. That piece of it was very collaborative. We talked about what we want to see. They decided they wanted a nighttime and daytime [perspective]. It'll eventually be displayed in one long 10-foot piece.

Why is art important to men and women in reentry?

That's a huge question. For me, art has just been important in life. Not just visual art, per se. I'm a musician by training. But, it's just this creative process that all humans have. It's a part of us, as we get older, that we forget as a resource.

Especially if you've been institutionalized, and regulated, and all of that. The creative spirit that really feeds our resilience, our problem-solving skills, our gratitude for beauty, our traditions—they get left behind. For me, that is the foundation of all of us. So, any kind of interaction we have with a creative process just serves to nurture that and bring it back to light.

I hear this all the time from participants: "Wow, I can't believe that I'm capable of this." "I feel like it's opening a part of me that forgot." "I used to do this as a child." You know, the ability to think imaginatively and dream them, and see the possibilities in life.

Along the way, did you learn anything about yourself?

This entire process and the reason I do this is because I'm learning about myself. There's an amazing quote by an Aboriginal activist, Lilla Watson. She said, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But, if you have come here because your liberation is bound to mine, then we can work together." That's the foundation of my work. This process has helped me grow as a human being. If I can share that, in any way, then that's why I do it.

Anything else you'd like to add?

One thing about how I got into the work, which I think is why I'm working in this population. I was asked to do a project with young women who were on probation. I came into Community Works doing a project around the Japanese American internment. I'm Japanese American, and [internment] impacted my entire family. I happily did that with a group of high school kids. And then I was asked to continue with these young women who were on probation.

As I was working with all of these folks, I was taken by the connection that I had with them. I had never been incarcerated, but we connected on these levels of deep shame and guilt that I realized I had been harboring for most of my life. I felt so connected to these young women.

I realized that I am a product of incarcerated parents, and that that legacy of incarceration has been passed down through generations. We carry that shame of being separated, cast aside, and stigmatized. That resonated with me on such a deep level. I realized that I had this healing journey to go on. I was just blessed to be able to do that. I'm not in any of this as a savior. This is my journey. I feel very blessed and grateful to be able to share it with others.

When is the next class or workshop?

Every Monday, from 5-7 pm.

PAT MIMS, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE and I was still on fire about learning new things. Vocational Office Services was mentioned to me. I jumped on this opportunity as I knew the world was going to be led by computers, and I couldn't even type.

"Within two years I completed the vocational office services training. I could type 45 words a minute without looking at the keys, operate the ins and outs of Microsoft programs, and I could

format professional correspondence and was

totally equipped to take on the responsibility of managing an office. I continued with the self-help programs while completing this vocation. The self-help programs brought balance to my life as they were teaching me about the way I was looking at life in a way that had me interested to learn more. Prison is a place where there is no stability in one's life. A person could be there today and be gone tomorrow. My points dropped again, and I

PROGRAMS



Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc.: Housing First

Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc. got its start 12 years ago in San Mateo County. Its mission—to provide transitional housing to men just getting out of jail or prison—was the continuation of proprietor Shirley Lamarr's work inside a county jail, in Redwood City. She had been seeing meager resources available to those just getting out of jail or prison. She felt she had to do something.

"They have nowhere to go when they get out of jail," Lamarr said. "They can't go back to family. Some of the families are in worse shape than the person is. And some families just can't cope with all the chaos and trauma from a family member with all of these issues. It was heartbreaking."

Lamarr, a graduate of Delancey Street Foundation, a national organization offering residential programs for substance-use, reentry, and homelessness, formed Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc. Since July 2016, Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc. has been in Contra Costa County. The organization has a 10-bed house in Antioch, off of West 16th Street.

Lamarr doesn't call what she has a facility. What she has is a house—a house that serves 10 men at a time, or roughly 20-30 men a year. That number is smaller than the number she served in

San Mateo County, which was about 40-50 men a year. But, it's also a smaller property. She was forced out of San Mateo County due to rising housing costs there.

"I was encouraged to round it out to 90 days," Lamarr said, of the number of days for each person's stay. But, she added, "That's a joke. So, I said, 'Six months.'"

Men seeking transitional housing at Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc. are encouraged to go through HealthRIGHT 360. Once HealthRIGHT 360 makes a referral, Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc. is notified and conducts an interview with the applicant, either by her or by one of her volunteers. Lamarr doesn't use the term, clients. She uses "my people."

In 2019, Lamarr has her sights on expanding her organization.

"I am very diligently looking for real estate agents that would be willing to team up and partner with me," she said. "And talk to some of these homeowners into allowing people a second chance, by letting them live in their properties, under correct and accountable supervision."

For more information on Mz. Shirliz Transitional Inc., please call (650) 218-8256. Or schedule an appointment with The Reentry Network at (844) 819-9840.

was up for transfer because of positive programming. The good thing about this transfer is that I had now proven myself to be credible within the institutions. Meaning, all of the self-help programs, the vocational trades and the lack of disciplinary violations placed me in a position to better advocate for where I wanted to go as opposed to the counselor picking a place for me. I now felt like I was back in control of my life and what that destiny would look like as I was finally feeling heard about what I wanted for myself. I was locked up and, at the same time, I had a sense of freedom. I chose San Quentin as my next destination, and what I did not know then that it would be my final destination before being released. I chose this place because of the college program. This ninth grade dropout now wanted to go to college. Imagine that!

SAN QUENTIN 1998

"As the bus drove onto the compound I saw all of the horror stories that had played through my mind from others who had survived a stay there in the past. This place had a cloud over it that felt eerie, in a sense; yet, I would not allow my mind to sit in those thoughts, as I knew my purpose for wanting to get to this place: I wanted to go to college. I immediately signed up for the college program and decided that I wanted to take the vocational plumbing trade. Trade during the day, college at night—this was better than I could have ever imagined. I felt that the more I knew about construction, the easier it would be for me to get a job. I also told myself that when I, one day, become a homeowner, I would be able to fix all of the costly repairs. I was thrilled at being in this place, as it was nothing like what was described to me in the horror stories.

"I graduated the plumbing program and received my degree from Patton University within four years of my arrival at San Quentin. School taught me how to critically think about situations and how to express my thoughts on paper. Plumbing reinforced my knowledge of the trades and had me confident that I was employable once released. I felt empowered with all of the information I had received over the years; however, at the same time, I felt helpless because I went in front of the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) and was denied three years because of my crime. I remember that afternoon vividly as I walked out of that hearing stunned at the three-year denial. I shared the news with someone who I respected as an elder, and he told me to meet him at the library after count cleared in the evening as he walked back to his job assignment. We met in the library that evening and he sat next to me at a table. Whispering, he shared what ended up being the most powerful statement I had ever heard. He said, 'Patrick, there are three ways out of prison: the Board, the courts, or in a pine box. Which do you choose?' I knew right then that a pine box was out of the question, and I had just come from the Board that handed out my denial so casually I felt as though the processed was rigged. So legal seemed like a good idea at the time. He then went on to explain how to write a legal argument. I could see the similarity of writing a paper for college and writing a legal argument. I knew right then I had a new calling: I would fight for my freedom through the power of the pen.

"In the meantime, I continued to participate in self-help groups as an emerging and then well-respected leader of the community. Yes, community! Prison is a community of individuals forced to live together as a result of their transgressions against society. My thought was in how I could contribute to this society. I witnessed that people were struggling with basic reading and

PROGRAMS

"The Bigger Picture": **Promoting Positive Habits**

Marquetis Mourning started attending "The BIGGER Picture" workshops a few months ago, because of the diverse topics they cover. Some meetings the topic would be about pitfalls during reentry—how old habits have a way of resurfacing and wreaking havoc on our lives. Other times they would be about daily practices that

promote self-awareness and self-care. Mourning has attended enough workshops to feel comfortable requesting specific topics. He has also invited others to join him for the meetings.

Developed by The Reentry Network, "Reentry: The BIGGER Picture" workshop series introduces discussion topics that aim to provide the full scope of the criminal justice system, its impact on families and broader the community, and the roles

individuals

play in sustaining the system. Meetings are monthly and are hosted by The Reentry Network at its Antioch office. The workshop series is open to all reentry network participants, as well as community partners that provide services to the reentry population.

Participant Rodney Mayes, like Mourning, has become a regular participant at the workshops. He enjoys the workshops as a way to sustain healthy, positive habits. After he signed up for

services offered by The Reentry Network, he

was able to find housing and make advances in his job. Mayes has since stabilized himself by living more independently, paying rent, and becoming an active member of the community. He's excited about his progress and wants it to continue.

For more information on "Reentry: The BIGGER Picture," please write to 5119 Lone Tree Way, Antioch, CA 94531, or call The Reentry Network at (844) 819-9840.

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

REMEDY Support Group 😌

5-7:30pm, women and men, 18 and over, at risk for chronic illness; first and third Thursdays at West County Health Clinic, 13601 San Pablo Ave, San Pablo; second and fourth Thursdays at Pittsburg Health Center, 2311 Loveridge Road, Pittsburg

Forward Thinking 🐯

5:30-7:30pm, men's support group, Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Avenue, Rich-

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 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

LAST THURSDAY (ONGOING)

"Reentry: The BIGGER Picture" Workshop 📀 6-8pm, hosted by the Reentry Network at HealthRight 360, 5119 Lone Tree Way, Antioch

PAT MIMS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

writing so I reached out to a local literacy program and developed a peer-to-peer mentoring program. I participated in a Restorative Justice program that was so powerful I did not want it to end. I developed curriculum for the program to have another phase. I called it, 'The Next Step.' My closest friend mentioned to me the sadness in people returning to the institution after a couple of days of freedom and we concluded it was around drugs. He and I then developed and wrote an addiction recovery program where men in blue would become certified drug and alcohol counselors. A peer and well-respected member of our community committed suicide. This devastated all of us, as we all spoke of how we had just seen him at breakfast and how we could not tell he was struggling this hard to live. As a result, I was instrumental in developing a peer counseling program that addressed peer-to-peer struggles in coping with a life sentence and dayto-day life inside without ever knowing when you are coming home.

"I went before the BPH again after three years and was denied again another two years. This time it did not hurt as much as the last. The news of being denied release felt more like a process than anything else. I was more concerned about remaining confident after such a denial, for all of the people who were looking to me as a leader. I did not want my denial to affect how they viewed their own chances at freedom. Two years from that date I again sat in front of the BPH and received a unanimous decision granting release. I cried like a baby, as I knew at that moment I was going home. I still did not know when, but at least I had the approval. I thought about it: home was a place I had given up on ever seeing again when I first started this journey and now I was sobbing tears about being able to go back. The process took 180 days before the Governor, then Arnold

Schwarzenegger, rescinded the decision and felt that I should stay in for life. I petitioned the court and appealed the decision of the Governor. The court saw merit to my claim and ordered my release within nine months of the Governor's decision.

"Twenty years, 64 days, nine and a half hours, and 30 seconds later, I ended my journey with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Although I appeared to exhibit a great deal of confidence, underneath this thick layer of skin was fear. It was now when the rubber meets the road. What would I do? I had created a huge network of supporters from all of the work accomplished over the years, so I started to reach out to people. I saw right at that moment is where numerous people fall off and go back to their old way of thinking. I remember that my best thinking back then handed me a 20-to-life sentence and I would not allow that old way of thinking to get me anymore time ever again. Struggle is something that I had become used to and I knew that my worst day out here would be better than my best day in there. Without hope to carry me through the struggle, I might not have made it out of the prison system alive. I knew now that all of the disciplines I had learned inside, such as exercising, studying, budgeting money, and remaining of integrity, would reap major successes for me if I stuck to the principles that worked for me while inside without ever giving up.

"Five years after being released and only six months after getting off of parole, I was invited with my colleagues to the White House to meet President Barack Obama. Go figure, from the 'Big house' to the White House. A person who was once deemed a menace to society was now being honored for his contribution to the community. As I look back at my journey I would not change anything about it as I have come to a bold conclusion: 'Prison saved my life.'"

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 THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

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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.



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