

VOICE

Fall 2019

REENTRY PROFILE



Sonja Sample remembers when she stopped taking medication for schizophrenia: she became incarcerated. Thinking back to when she was locked up, she said: “There were so many people inside who suffered from mental illness.

“I am 33 years old. I am a mother of four. I am a college graduate, as a dental assistant. I’m currently enrolled in school for dental hygiene. My passion, other than being a mother, is music. I write and I sing rap. I’m a songwriter.

“Everything that I do is around caring. I care for myself. I care for my children. I care for people around me, their feelings—what makes people happy, what makes people cry, why people do certain things. I’m a very caring, compassionate person.

“I have learned that I’m a lot stronger than I thought myself to be. That there’s a lot more help out there than a lot of people claim there isn’t. There are a lot of programs and resources that are connected with people that need to get back into society. A lot of people be, like—you know?—they just wanna see you fail. There is that part of it, but if you’re willing and wanting and have the need for change in your life, there’s a place out there that will help you and support you and guide you.

“I’m a very resourceful person. I’ve always been like that. When I was in jail, I would go to the library and get the printouts. That’s how I learned about [The Reentry Network at HealthRight 360]. I wrote it down on a piece of paper. I tried to get connected to them when I was in there, but they said once I’m released, that’s when they’re able to assist.

“Once I was released, I pulled out that paper and called, and they’ve been so helpful ever since.

“I had a job, and I lost that job. I was struggling with keeping food. They would tell me where I could go for food, where I could get assistance with rent. They’re resourceful, as well, which helps me out. **CONTINUES ON PAGE 3**



The Reentry Success Center is now open
Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 8:30pm!
Go there for evening referrals to services and
to get started on your reentry journey

REENTRY PROFILE



Carolyn Marie Escalera reflects on the steps she has taken to move herself forward: “I lived with hard times throughout my life: low-income family, struggles, trials and tribulations. I was homeless for three years. I was basically homeless off and on throughout my life, but three years recently. I just got off the street.

“I had struggles with the street problems, struggles through being victimized, sexually and mentally abused. I’ve recovered and I’m working with [HealthRight 360], trying to get my life back together.

“I’ve gone through lots of trials and tribulations. I grew up without my dad, so I’ve had trials and tribulations that come with that. I was sexually abused throughout my life. I became very angry. The anger—I know I have to control that. There’s a lot of stuff I have to work with. I’m very strong-willed. I learned from my experience.

“A lot of times, on the street, I felt less thirst for success. I was fighting just to live, and I had doubts that I was going to be able to get my strength back. When I got back on my feet, I felt good—you know?—to be back in my life. To be able to have a future.

“People judged me when I was acting out, but it feels good to have willpower, to stand on your

own, to be independent, to not always have to count on somebody else. When people judge me, they don’t get the story. They look at how I act, or the way I dress, not the inside of my personality. They always judge me, they always get to me ‘cause they’re always wrong. Sometimes, I just react. ‘How dare you judge me?’ It hurts at times, but I have to say I judge myself, too. People can change, no matter how deep they’ve been all their life.

“[HealthRight 360] helped me with clothing, personal hygiene stuff. When I was out in the street, they bought me a kit. They bought me an air mattress. They bought me so much stuff. It helped me. It helped me a lot. It was a blessing.

“I get angry. I do have an anger issue. They understand it. They’re trying to work through it with me. They’re the best thing that ever happened to me. What I’d say to people reentering is, place the past behind you. Don’t let your past destroy your present and future time, because you have a way to stay free. There’s a lot of programs out there that can help you. As long as you get yourself involved, you could actually take a step forward.

“I know there’s a lot of people out there that are scared. Stop being scared. Get yourself some help. Stop being your enemy.”

EDITORS’ NOTES

Dear readers,

Fall often brings up images of colorful leaves, scary costumes, turkey and stuffing, and decorated trees. What fall also brings up, which few of us like to admit, is the challenges. We’re not talking about the days getting shorter and the nights getting longer. While the weather is cooler, it’s not that, either. Fall, perhaps more than any other season, brings up family—what we’re taught they should look like, in movies and on TV, versus what families truly are, which is complicated and real.

In this issue, our stories honor the realness of life, and families, and the struggles we take on that sometimes lead to a reward—a job, a second chance, a solid supporter, a loving community, a place to call home. We hope these stories lift your spirits and challenge you to think about what’s possible, for you.

Pat

Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

Patrice

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.

SOS! Richmond: Promoting Safe Spaces

The idea came to resident and longtime homeless advocate Daniel Barth as he stood, watching an encampment get dismantled and removed. He had run homeless shelters for 26 years and had seen the increasing number of homeless individuals in his central Richmond neighborhood. As Barth saw people's belongings get pushed into a pile for removal, someone he knew, who lived in that encampment, yelled at one of the city workers, "How can I get one of your jobs?"

From that question, SOS! Richmond was born. SOS stands for Safe Organized Spaces, and it's a program Barth hopes will evolve into something bolder: a true intervention towards ending homelessness.

"Two years ago I noticed, right near GRIP (Greater

Richmond Interfaith Program), some folks who were beginning to sleep in tents," Barth said. "I started to talk with them, and came to them with my idea. My idea was, we need to create a safe place for folks to live in tents, so there is sanitation, so they're able to go to the bathroom appropriately. A place to store food, so it's safe, and so we don't have rat-infested encampments."

The encampment, which had formed right outside GRIP, "wasn't a healthy community," conceded Barth. But, he added, "it was a safer community than living along the railroad tracks."

Fast forward two years, and now SOS! Richmond's streets team picks up trash as a way to get homeless people

engaged in the community. The team's goal is to improve living conditions in the encampments. The team covers the four-mile Richmond Greenway, which runs straight across the city, from San Pablo Avenue to Richmond Parkway.

"We should be paying folks to do the clean-up that otherwise doesn't happen," Barth said.

REENTRY CONNECTION

During his years running homeless shelters, Barth saw countless people come in directly from the hospital, prison, and jail.

"Sometimes, they come in the gown they were wearing in the Emergency Room," he said. "Sometimes, they come in straight from Santa Rita (Alameda County). Sometimes, they hitchhike to our shelters."

Barth's approach is simple, yet effective. He said he doesn't ask, "Where'd you come from?" "What are you suffering from?" "What is it that made you homeless?" His goal is to simply meet the person, learn what strengths they have, and what they could work on together.

"If folks are coming out of institutions like prison or jail, conditions are stacked up against them," Barth said. "I'm not asking, 'Did you get out of prison?' No. We're working with folks as people."

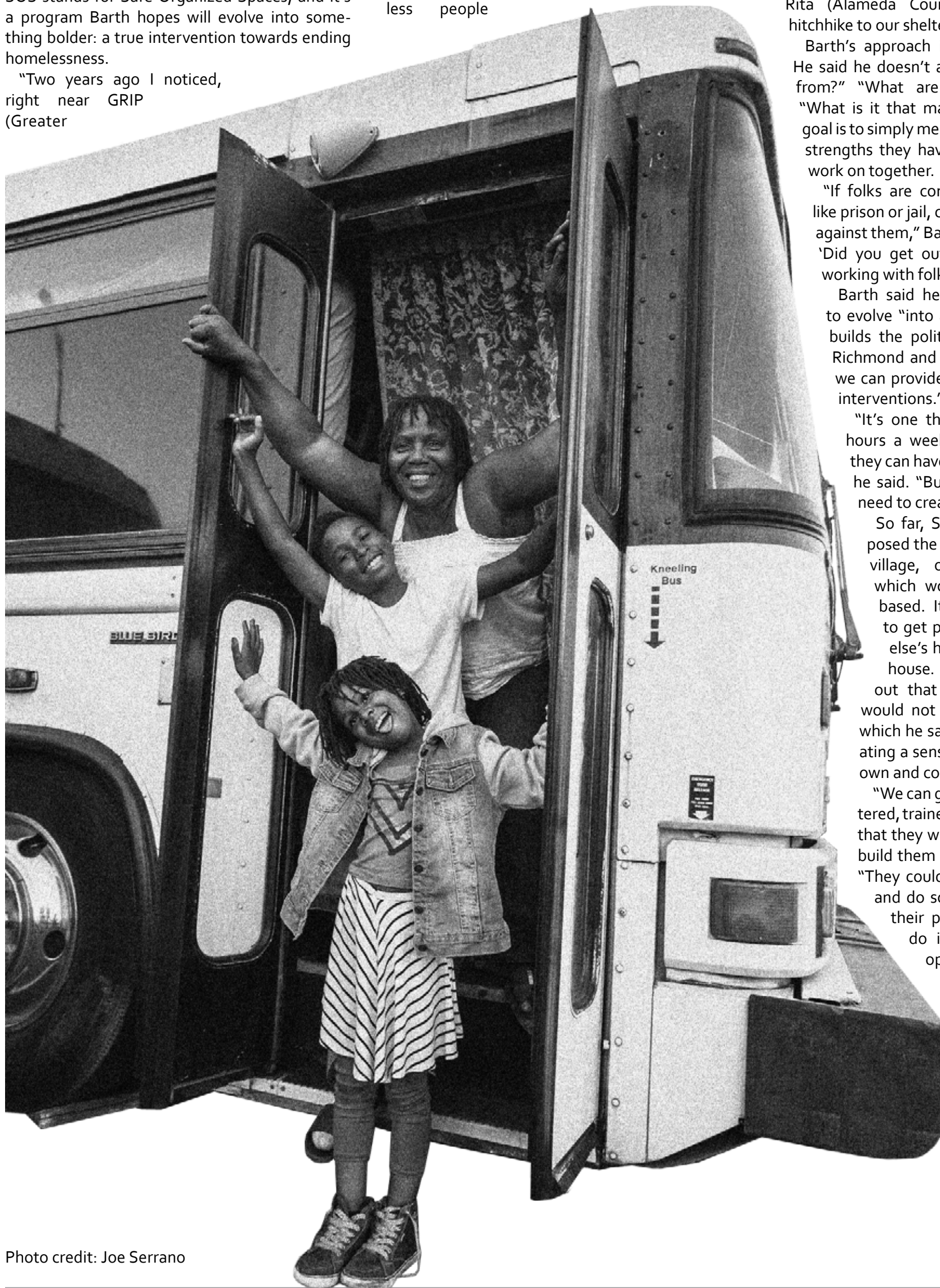
Barth said he wants SOS! Richmond to evolve "into an organizing body that builds the political will, in the City of Richmond and in West County, so that we can provide programs that are true interventions."

"It's one thing to give [people] 12 hours a week, \$15 an hour, so that they can have money in their pocket," he said. "But they need shelter. We need to create an alternative."

So far, SOS! Richmond has proposed the creation of a transitional village, or temporary housing, which would be empowerment-based. It would offer programs to get people not into someone else's house, but into their own house. Barth was quick to point out that the transitional village would not be a navigation center, which he said, "are not good at creating a sense of place where people own and contribute."

"We can get folks, who are unsheltered, trained to build the very cabins that they will sleep in, and then also build them for other folks," he said. "They could be paid a livable wage and do something productive for their peers. What we need to do is build the investment opportunities for folks to be participating in interventions like this, not just being a client or a consumer."

For more information, contact Daniel Barth at (510) 990-2686 or on Facebook at SOS! Richmond Safe Organized Spaces.



My name is Steven Minor, born in Compton, California, but raised in Waco, Texas. I'm 52 years old, spent all my teen years in a Texas prison, was released after doing 29 years flat on a 30-year sentence in March of 2014, was released into the custody of my mother and father, then moved in with my younger brother who I have a great relationship with. I'm the 3rd child, my siblings are 3a other brothers, Dwayne, Darrin and Louis Jr. My mother and father are still living, mother 83, father 78. I come from a very abusive family. I started drinking and doing drugs at a very young age, at the age of 12 to be exact, my father introduced drugs to all his sons. From straight to crime, which went to in and out of jails. At the age of 17, I had my first trip to prison. I was sentenced to 30 years for aggravated robbery with the intent to kill. I did 29 years on that 30, was released, moved to California with a young lady I met, was here for three years, and went back to prison here. Was sent to San Quentin. Did one year and 10 months.

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While in San Quentin, I had a lot to think about. First, I was homeless before I went. I had no I.D., no Social Security card, and no birth certificate, which are things you need to get a job. I had no family here in California, either. The other thing I had on my mind was somewhere I could go to have shelter, a place to lay my head. The one fact in my life was I can't keep coming to prison. I've only been twice, and that was enough for me. I refused to get back on drugs and alcohol.

While in prison, one of my counselors took an active role in finding me a shelter to be entered into, then there was a lady who I love very much named Amanda Berger, who heads a program called Insight Garden, who helped in finding me a shelter, a positive support group, and a job. She arranged for me to have transportation to Richmond, California, where I met the man who runs the Reentry Success Center. His name is Pat Mims, who has become one of my best friends. Before I was a member there, I really didn't have much to look forward to. The Reentry Success Center helped in getting my I.D. card, Social Security card, and my birth certificate.

The hardest obstacle we had was the birth certificate. At times, I had gotten so discouraged that I started drinking again, but I always had someone to talk to who put me back on track. Besides my identification, I needed employment. Amanda took care of that. One evening, I was at the shelter, Amanda called and asked how was my employment hunt going. I told her that my counselor at the Reentry Success Center, Tiffany, had a job lined up for me at Whole Foods warehouse. Amanda asked was I interested in working at a restaurant. I responded, yes. She informed me that she had set up an interview with a friend of hers at the Cala Mexican Restaurant in San

Francisco, and gave me the number and address, that the owner already knew I didn't have my I.D., Social Security card, or birth certificate. I went to the interview and was hired on the spot. I'm still there. September 13, 2019 marked my first whole month, and I see a long future there. My getting out San Quentin was pretty scary for me, with no family here, me and my girlfriend breaking up as soon as I entered prison, not knowing anyone to get help from. So being introduced to the Reentry Success Center was a blessing from God. Because of my participation in the Reentry Success Center, my life has really improved. I'm a graduate of the Alpha Program, which teaches you how to deal with mental problems, anger problems, and gives you a positive way of thinking. I'm working and in a positive relationship with a wonderful woman, who I love with all my heart and soul. Keeping my commitments with the Reentry Success Center keeps me grounded. They really care about the members of the Center, which is something someone fresh out of prison needs. Without them and all the other people connected with them, my story could have been a horror story. They pushed me to take the steps to always be positive. Thank you, Steven Minor

SONJA SAMPLE, CONT'D FROM FRONT PAGE They may not have the actual resources themselves, but they can let me know what other places may be able to assist me. Then they told me that a job opening was available. My case manager there—Hector—he's amazing. "He told me that Lowe's is hiring, that they're having a hiring event. I was, like, okay, you know? It was getting really rough. I was enrolled in school and buying gas for school. They helped out with gas cards. They continuously helped me get to school. And I went to the hiring event, and

I got hired. "The help and the resource is there, as long as we're willing to seek it out or do the footwork. They gave me gift cards when I first got out. They helped me with gift cards to get me clothes for work. They got me a bike, because I wasn't driving yet. They said they're willing to help me because they see that I am the type that's willing to do good and better myself. They said I was the first person that ever asked for a bike. They were able to get that. I was amazed. "Don't be afraid to ask for help. You're not

alone. Because of that, there's support for your situation. "Despite the reason for why you're in there, try to look at it as a life lesson. Look at it as a learning experience. When you look at it that way, you won't feel so disconnected and alone when you're in there and when you get back out. You'll take it, you'll learn from it, and you'll move forward. "Don't let the illness be you. Don't let them define you."

EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Men’s Support Group
5:30-7:30pm, Rubicon Programs, 101 Broadway Street, Richmond

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

Restorative Circles
5:30-7:30pm, community, members, and drop-ins welcome, Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Ave, Richmond

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

LGBT Wellness Recovery Action Plan
1:00-2:15pm, free community workshop to develop skills to manage anxiety and stress, Rainbow Community Center, 2118 Willow Pass Road, Suite 500, Concord

REMEDY Support Group
5:00-7:30pm, 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

Men’s Support Group
5:30-7:30pm, Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Ave, Richmond

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
10:00am-12:00pm, employment, housing, health and other assistance, Reentry Success Center, 912 Macdonald Ave, Richmond

FIRST & THIRD FRIDAY (ONGOING)

Debtor’s Rights Clinic
9:30am-1:00pm, 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

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 poem by Amber Senegal

Set Free to See

Visions, Dreams, Memories
all filled with pain.
Evil bad & oh so wrong.
I just want to be set free, and maybe just maybe finally be able to see.
My mind won’t still and just slow down
Evil, bad, and oh so wrong
So now let me begin to sing this song.
Visions, Dreams, and Memories
I wish they were all so good!
But just so you know, they are not, they are all so very dark and mean.
Beatings—Drugs—and despair
Rapes—torture—with nothing left to spare
I can’t get it out, so I open my eyes to stop all the pain. But it’s too deep and it’s too raw.
Visions so clear,
Memories they fail to fade,
the dreams are so alive
They’ve began to eat my soul
they start to suck me dry
they’ve even began to steal all my joy.
I can’t let them win, so now you see,
Again, I can’t let them win!
But all of this will depend
So I close my eyes all over again.
Blackness to light, maybe I might,
Put on my armor and put up a good fight!
The war will be hard, and it will depend on

if I’m ready to put on my crown and win.
I think I can. I know I can.
So I open my eyes wide shut.
Visions I see
Memories so near
The dreams they are all so clear
I stand up and Say, So Here’s the deal!
My past is my past, and I don’t want it to last so I take out my Gold Sword!
OH, I don’t have to worry about being bored!
Vivid visions, dreams I can touch,
memories that I turn into dust.
Today’s the day that I must lay them out and relinquish all my control.
I take my sword and swing real hard
Slicing at them all.
I will them all gone!
I conquer them all
and open up my Beautiful eyes
and there I find a huge surprise!
All I see is myself
and I see the most amazing thing.
Here is what I began to see.
All my anguish, All my pain
Has all been washed away clean!
So, just maybe now I’ll be set free
And once again, maybe
I’ll be forever able to see!

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

9x9 grid with some numbers pre-filled for a Sudoku puzzle.

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ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

9x9 grid with numbers pre-filled for a Sudoku puzzle, representing the solution to the previous issue.

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



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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, Family, Financial, Education, Health, Employment, Benefits, Legal