

# VOICE

Issue 23 / 2024

REENTRY PROFILE



Donnie, a father of two, would tell anyone that he’s had quite a life journey (so far). Here, he waxes poetical about highlights.

Please tell us about yourself.

Let’s see here. What can I say right now...Okay. Before I got here, I was my lifestyle, which I thought was a good one. I sold drugs, I went to prison, and then I was managing a strip club in San Francisco. That whole culture, that whole lifestyle, was very toxic, but I didn’t realize it. I didn’t think about it at the time, until when my daughter made art for Father’s Day. I looked at it and I said [to myself], “I got to stop doing that. That represents everything I’m trying to keep away from my daughter.”

When I moved out here to Contra Costa County is when I actually went into treatment. When I went to Discovery House, an alcohol and drug rehab center in Martinez, that actually changed my life. From there, I became more focused, I let that life go, and I learned a lot about myself.

During that time, I realized that all the pain and struggles and obstacles I went through—I had to endure those in order for me to be prepared for the next stage in life. With that being said, it doesn’t make all the pain go away, but what it does to me gives the pain a purpose. Does that make sense?

Yeah, it does. Going back to the picture, what did your daughter draw?

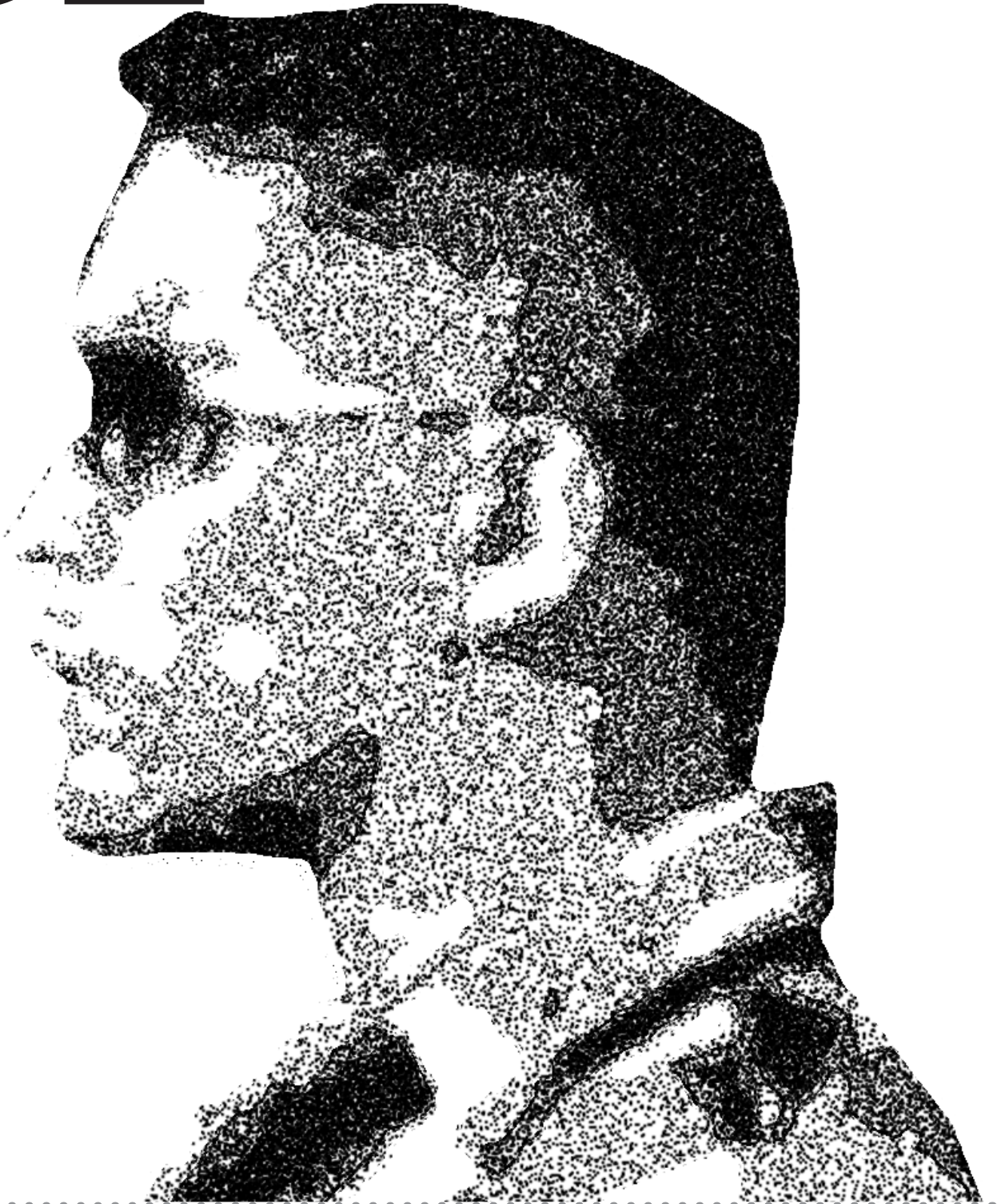
It was a collar shirt with a tie that she colored in—very cute. It had these sentences that I think were prewritten, and her teacher would ask her questions and she would answer it. It said, “I love my daddy because, and then he plays with me. My daddy is very nice.” Then she said, “My daddy works selling tickets for people who want see movies.”

That’s what bothered me, because she thought I was working at the theater, which actually was The Mitchell Brothers Theater. It’s not movies, it’s a strip club. There were movies there, but they were adult videos. I felt I was deceiving her. I didn’t want her to grow up embarrassed of what her dad does. I love my daughter too much to deceive her in that way. So I had to leave it. It was very hard.

Regarding Discovery House, what did you learn about yourself while you were there?

It was April 19, 2019. I remember that day, because that’s when I started my journey back in recovery and letting go of the past. I remember before I walked into Discovery House, I stopped because I was scared of death. I never knew a life without the drugs or somewhere in the underworld. That was what I lived with and lived in for so long, that it was all normal for me.

I thought to myself, if I walk through those doors, I can never have another drug again in my life. That bothered **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**



HOW TO

Start Conversations

We connect to others through conversation. How many times have you struck up a conversation with someone at the bus stop, while waiting in line at the grocery store or the post office, and during a break at a meeting? By asking questions, and then listening for answers, we’re able to gather information: if someone is interesting, interested, or both; if they prefer basketball over baseball; and even if they’re friend or foe. Although this publication is not as one-on-one, it strives to accomplish something similar. It’s alive because we strive to start conversations among justice-impacted individuals and also among the wider community. This community includes people who know the way forward through lived experience, people who have never been locked up and who want to be a support, and everyone else in between. So, imagine for a moment. We’re standing in line somewhere. What would you ask us? What would you like to read about? Submit your stories and story ideas 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.

EDITORS’ NOTES

Dear readers, Sometimes it’s easy to get up in the morning. Sometimes it’s not. It becomes even more irritating when the drive from within just isn’t there. We get it—we’ve been there, too. We also know that change starts by taking one step forward and then another and then another, until at some point it doesn’t really matter how the morning is—it just is. What becomes more important is what to do with what is. We come to realize that the steps don’t have to be huge strides. They can be seemingly tiny ones. In this issue, you’ll find examples of what’s possible with each positive step and when positive goals are set. They inform one’s purpose. They also benefit others. It’s like a smile to a stranger: you may never truly know how it benefitted them.

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.



**DONNIE, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE**  
me. That scared the hell out of me. But I figured I had to do it because of my daughter. I didn't like the person I was at the time. I felt that it all had to stop and I couldn't do it by myself.

At Discovery House, I learned that recovery and getting off the drugs is simple, but it's not easy, because you only have to change one thing and that one thing is everything. When I heard that and I accepted that, it's when things started to make sense and started to change for me. I learned that things aren't always about me.

At one time, I felt that I was like the sun and the world revolved around me. I was very ego-driven. Going into its treatment program gave me tools and then it sparked something in me. I graduated from Discovery House and was elected member of the board of its alumni association. I was accepted into the SPIRIT Program\* at Contra Costa College.

I learned a lot about motivational interviewing. I learned a lot about case management and active listening. I also learned a lot about myself and how to deal with people, because it's going into [job-related] fields that involve dealing with people. I have to make sure that I leave my judgments and my expectations at the door, because you never know what's going to happen. You never know who's going to come through the door.

When I completed that program, the fire was lit from under me. And I laughed because who would've thought, a couple years ago when I was dealing drugs and in the sex entertainment industry, that my focus and my passion would be in the business of healing? I never would've believed it.

**If you could describe yourself in one word, what would that word be?**

"Motivated," because I know now that I have a purpose. My life actually has a purpose. When I got into recovery and started living a life of sobriety and healing and helping others, that's what motivated me. In my past, I would always follow the high from the drugs or the strip club, but now I get that feeling when I work with somebody, when I see it in their eyes, when everything just clicks.

At that moment they have hope; they're not so lost. They actually look forward to the day in front of them, the light at the end of the tunnel, the way out. Their spirit is no longer broken. When that happens, when I see that, I get the chills, and that's the feeling I get from recovery.

I learned you can't keep it unless you give it away. So helping people heal also helps me. It helps me in my journey because it reminds me of my struggles and what I

don't want to go back to. It motivates me to keep going forward and then also to try to chase the feeling of that empowerment. When I see that, it makes me feel almost electric.

**What does the saying, "Get back on one's feet," mean to you?**

To get back on my feet is knowing that all the struggles and obstacles and pain are necessary. That's growth. Where you grow is when you face those things. When you do something that you've never done before. Either you can commit to constant growth and face discomfort on your own accord and be the master of your own destiny, or you can hand over the keys and let life happen to you by default.

It's your choice. One leads to success, the other leads to pain and struggling. And I know that now. I'm capable of returning and getting back on my feet, because the storms and fires inside of me are stronger than the storms outside of me. I'm capable as long as I do the work. I understand that I can't just wait for it to happen, I've actually got to make it happen. Also, reaching out and asking for help, which is something that I wouldn't do before because I thought it was weak. Now, I'm open to all the resources and help that are available. Everything that's available to me, I'll take advantage of it.

**What motivates you to keep going even on days or weeks or months when things are not going your way?**

That's an interesting question, because I also suffer from depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Sometimes, it gets really heavy. With those days where I feel it's not productive or it's not working for me, I tend to isolate. I would isolate, which I know is not what you should do, but it's one of my coping skills. I find some alone time. Understanding that it's all happening for a reason and also that I've got to trust the process and can't rush it.

I gotta actually trust it—I can't get to a five-year destination overnight. There are steps involved in the process. Many times I come across those days where I just say, "Man, why am I doing all this? What's it all for?" And then something brings me back to when I made my commitment.

Not every day is going to be motivated or motivational. Just like when people start a new hobby or whatever, they're on fire, they're excited, they're motivated, but somewhere along the way, something starts slowing down, starts

questioning their faith and their commitment. My thing is, will I still stay true to my commitment, even though the mood that I set it in is gone? So, I just remember [my commitment to myself]. Yes, it's hard. Yes, it's tough. But it's necessary, and it's learning. That's where the growth is.

**What advice would you give to individuals who are about to reenter society?**

You're kidding yourself if you think it's going to be sunshine and rainbows the moment you get out. You got to understand that it's going to take a while. It's going to take time, but you have to focus on keeping your eyes on the prize, knowing what you're doing it for. You have to have a goal—a reasonable goal.

Don't get discouraged; you have to have faith in yourself. I don't care how tough you are in prison, I don't care how strong you are, or how hard you hit. There's nothing that's going to hit you harder than life. Life will beat you down and bring you to your knees if you let it.

If you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth. Take accountability for what you've done, and just know that it's possible. It's possible. That's why I put a lot of emphasis on these programs. It's because they work.

Coming out of the prison system, when asking for help is almost like a sign of weakness—it's not weak, it's actually more of a strength. Say, "Hey, can you help me with this?" Or, "I need help with that." That pushes you forward towards your goal of where you want to be.

It might not be a huge step, but you have to celebrate small victories. Everybody has a purpose. Everybody, whoever they are, they matter. They're important. There's no substitute for work. That is the price you pay for success.

Success could be different for many people, but whatever it is you want, whatever you goal is, you got to put in the work. It depends on how bad you want it. You can do it absolutely 100 percent. Reach out to those people who will help you get you to the next level. If you want to change, you only got to change one thing. And that's everything.

\*SPIRIT is short for Service Provider Individualized Recovery Intensive Training, a 9-unit course taught in collaboration with Contra Costa Behavioral Health Services.





## Community Advisory Board on AB 109: Realigning Purpose

**This is Part 1 of 2 in a series:** Nicole Green eats, sleeps, and dreams reentry. She remembers her first corporate job at Wells Fargo when she was just 18 years old. By the time she left that company years later, she had been managing projects in at least three cities and with over 50 employees.

Green would be the first to tell anyone that she’s a product of her environment. Every decision—from the person she chose to marry, to the judge who told her she would be made an example of, to eventually turning her hurt and pain into purpose—informs her present moment.

“Before I met my husband, I had nothing on my record,” Green said. “But because of the way that I was treated, because God chose me to walk through that path of being inside...to go from that and [then] have doors stopped in my face. I was homeless. I lost my kids. I was on my own. I couldn’t even get hired at Costco. To go from having it to nothing, that’s what drives me.”

Green’s decisions eventually led her to Contra Costa County’s Community Advisory Board on Public Safety Realignment, where she serves as its chairperson. Known throughout the county simply as CAB, Green describes the board and its members as “the watchdogs of the money.”

“We are keeping an eye on the funding and the programs that are in place,” she said. “We are the voice for the voiceless.”

CAB gathers input from the community on what it needs and wants to prioritize. It tracks how state funding for the county’s reentry population is being used and reviews their outcomes. CAB also advises various county committees and departments on new and existing reentry programs in order to ensure everything stays consistent with the county’s strategic plan.

CAB has a mix of members who can vote and what it calls alternate members, who provide expertise in areas such as workforce development, criminal and drug court, and law and policy related to issues of justice-impacted individuals. All CAB members either live or work

in Contra Costa County.

Members who live in West County are Rena Hurley, Brenda Lee, Rena Moore, La Tanyua Thompson, and Justin Van Zerber. Members who live in Central County are Mark Danley and Jeffrey Robinson. Members who live in East County are Azi Carter and Nicole Green. And alternate member Rev. Julius X. Van Hook resides in Hercules (West County).

“I joined CAB to understand the funding and the programming, and also be the voice for housing,” Green said. “When I realized what [CAB is], and knowing what I experienced when I was incarcerated and what I went through, it made me want to stay even more because that was the stage where I can actually speak about not what people think happened, but what really

*When I was going through my issues of going in and out of jail, I was never offered any resources. Now, I try to make sure that women who are incarcerated are aware of these services and have people that can help them get the services they need to better their lives.*

happened when you walked out that door, what really happened when you’re facing society [again, after being locked up], and what really happened to a woman of color.”

CAB member Rena Moore, who has lived in Contra Costa County all her life and is also justice-impacted, agreed.

“The reason why I joined CAB was because, when I was going through my issues of going in and out of jail and everything, I was never offered any

resources,” Moore said. “I didn’t know that there were reentry providers out there. There was no information available at the jails and while I was on probation.”

Moore said she was never told about organizations, such as Rubicon Programs and the Reentry Success Center. She said she only learned about them many years later when her husband had been locked up. She attributes her long-term success to getting connected with reentry services. She was able to get back on the right track and arrive at a point in her life when she could serve as an advocate for others in the community, through CAB.

“I try to make sure that women who are incarcerated are aware of these services and have interaction with people that they can help them get the services they need to better their lives,” Moore said.

In addition to serving on CAB, Moore also works as a credible messenger and organizer for the Safe Return Project, based in Richmond, which develops strategies for justice-impacted individuals to take the lead on the issues that impact them.

“Once I was able to get resources,” Moore said, “my life completely changed.”

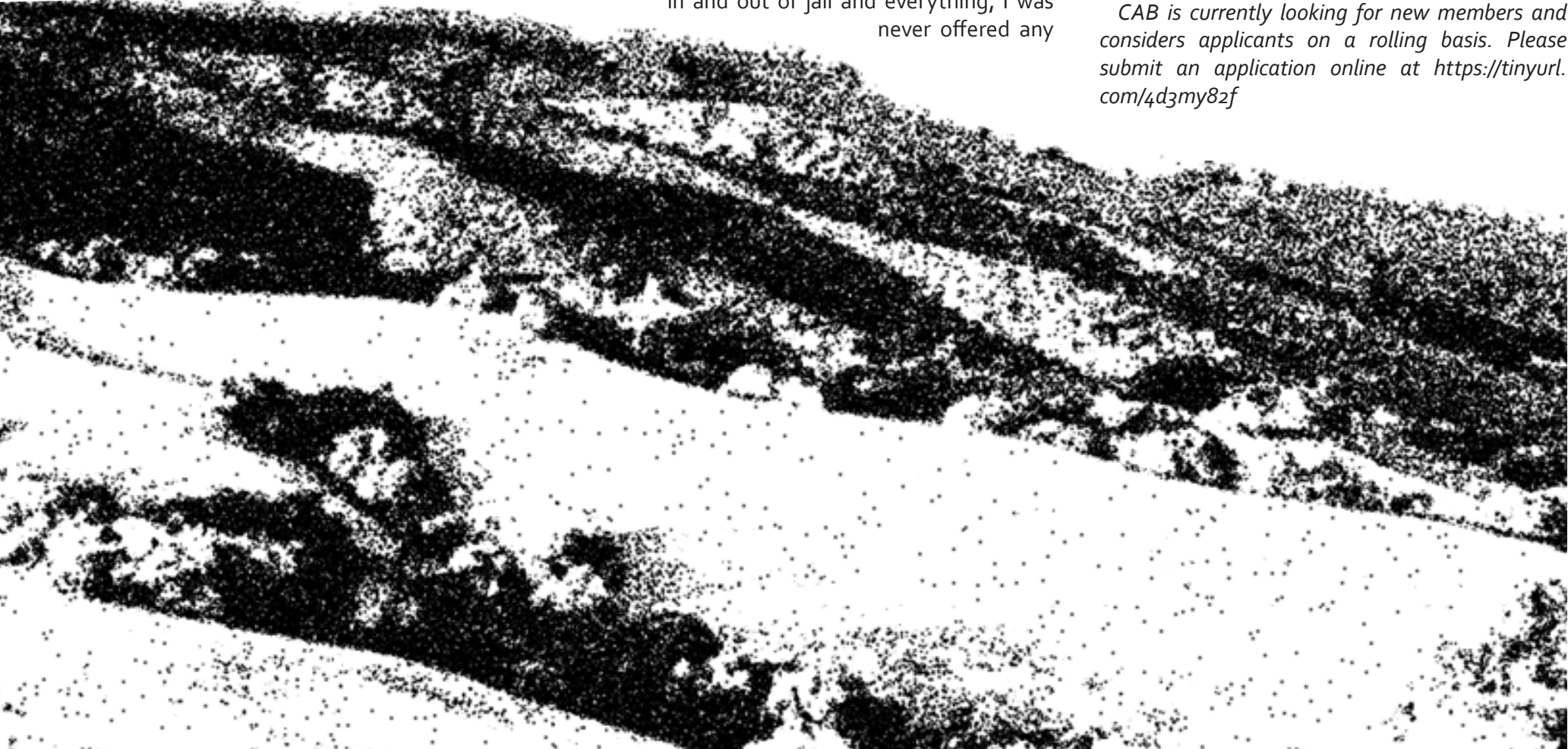
In Part 2 of this two-part series, Green and Moore discuss details of some of those changes as well as the board’s collective focus moving forward. We’re excited to share the continuation of this story in the next issue.

*The Community Advisory Board on Public Safety Alignment (AB 109) meets on the second Thursday of every month from 10:00 am to 12:00pm at the Probation Department, 50 Douglas Drive, Second Floor, in Martinez. A virtual option via Zoom is available to any member of the public joining remotely. Zoom links are included in meeting agenda packets posted online and at the meeting location.*

*CAB also has subcommittees, which have separate meeting schedules:*

- *Outreach & Community Engagement Subcommittee: Third Tuesday of every month, 11:00am to 12:30pm*
- *Program & Services Subcommittee: Third Thursday of every month, 11:00am to 12:30pm*
- *Policy & Budget Subcommittee: Third Friday of every month, 11:00am to 12:30pm*

*CAB is currently looking for new members and considers applicants on a rolling basis. Please submit an application online at <https://tinyurl.com/4d3my82f>*





EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)

Women’s Group

5:30-7:30pm, open to women interested in conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center; 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; call 800-816-4453 for details

Restorative Circles

5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center; 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, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

OTHER

Civic Education Workshops

6:00pm-7:30pm, open to all, every third Wednesday of the month, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360; call 925-732-1357 for details

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

Monthly Workshops

6:00-8:00pm, open to community and members, last Wednesday of the month, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360; call 925-732-1357 for details

Alpha Program

New cohort begins December 9, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

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

“Still I Rise,” by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
‘Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I’ll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don’t you take it awful hard  
‘Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines  
Diggin’ in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I’ll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I’ve got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history’s shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that’s rooted in pain  
I rise  
I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

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



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Family



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Employment