

VOICE

Issue 24 / 2024

REENTRY PROFILE



Ronell, HealthRIGHT 360’s field operations coordinator, needed a bit of encouragement before sharing that among other things, he’s a DJ. He enjoys music, traveling, and entertainment. He also has a few thoughts about the City of Antioch.

“I was born and raised in San Francisco. I grew up, for the most part, since I was 11 years old, in the juvenile justice system and carried that into adulthood. I graduated into adult activity. It all came to a screeching halt when I was about 25 years old. After going to prison several times, I was facing a really long stretch and I just kind of committed myself to whatever happened that time around—I would figure it out and right the ship. That’s kind of what happened. I ended up getting a 10-year joint suspension sentence as opposed to facing about 21 years.

“I went to a long-term drug program at Walden House, the drug program that HealthRIGHT 360 was founded on. I went through that program in 1984-85 and was not successful. I ended up using the stuff after that. But in 1992, when I came back, I’ve been clean ever since and I expunged most of my record and all of my prison convictions. I’m waiting for a pardon right now. I’ve been waiting for a pardon since 2010. I’ve been out and clean and sober for 32-plus years. I started working for Walden House in 1993, and then I left in 1994 and went to what you call the real world, which is just working in the private sector. In 2013, I came back to work for Walden House and HealthRIGHT 360. I’ve been there ever since.

“I live in Antioch. It’s important for me to share that because the city of Antioch has issues, and it’s a growing city in a county that has challenges. It’s important that readers know people like me live out here, that we’re concerned about reentry, working in reentry, and associated with the city. I also own a business here. This city is important to me because it’s where I live. A lot of us here want the city to do better and do well and be known for a city that’s on the rise, that’s inclusive, that’s diverse, and that we’re here to help and propel folks forward.

“I’m also in a fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha. It’s the oldest Black fraternity in the United States. It was founded in 1906. I do a lot of community service work with them. I graduated from college—I went back to college and got a criminology degree. I’m also a DJ. I run my DJ entertainment business. I volunteer in the community. I do a lot of stuff. My hobby is traveling—traveling and entertainment. I like to go to concerts, and I like to travel around the world. Going on vacations is one of my pastimes. I do it every year. I can’t function without vacation.

“I try to do as much as I can to help out causes in the Black community—anything to support Black businesses. Being involved in a fraternity, we try to make sure we advance the cause of Black businesses. I support recovery, as well. There’s a men’s support group that I’ve been in called Men in Motion. It’s self-sufficient—we don’t get any funding from anywhere. We are self-supported financially, and a lot of times we do events that fund-raise. We do free events and we do fundraisers that half of the proceeds go to different nonprofit organizations, like battered women’s shelters. We try to give back to the community what we have taken, just by trying to



support the community in any way we can.

“I’m resilient. Resilient is the word I choose because when all else fails, whatever I don’t have I have to manufacture it. I don’t look externally for confirmation. I don’t look externally for motivation. I can’t afford to rely on others, coming from where I came from. I have to know that it’s within. I have to know that when all else fails and everything falls around me. I have to be steadfast in my approach, to move forward on things, because that’s what it’s going to take for me to maintain my sobriety and my freedom.

“What’s been most helpful to me has been my wife. We’ve been married 30 years. We’re from the same housing project in Potrero Hill. We grew up in the same building. We parted ways and went in different directions, and then we came back together when I was around 25 years old. I was getting my freedom back and my sobriety and all that other stuff. We hooked up, and she started college, and I made sure she had everything she needed. She ended up going on and getting her master’s degree. She’s a retired probation officer. I learned a lot from her because she operates in the realm of ‘do the right thing,’ ‘be honest,’ and ‘be consistent,’ and just do them over and over and over.

“I learned from her how to be a good father, because I didn’t know **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**

EDITORS’ NOTES

Dear readers,
Community. Collaboration. Connection. Each one matters, and all of them together matter even more. Each and every story in each and every issue of this newspaper lifts up the importance of these three qualities. They are what make us human, and they are what make living less about survival and more about thriving. We simply can’t be resilient without putting them to good use.

In this issue, we share stories that, as one county partner said, bring hope and prove that recovery is real. We add to that sentiment that successful reentry is not only real, it’s achievable and within reach. As our stories spotlight, all journeys require commitment, and education, and leadership. This last quality, leadership, isn’t something that only a few possess—it’s in all of us.

Charmaine
Charmaine Hoggatt
The Reentry Network

Pat
Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

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

Community Advisory Board on AB 109: Lifting Up Lived Experience

This is Part 2 of 2 in a series: The Contra Costa County Community Advisory Board on Public Safety Alignment, known in reentry circles simply as CAB, was established in December 2012 by the Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) under the Department of Probation.

Back then few, if any, CAB members openly identified as justice-impacted. Then slowly, things began to change. CAB members, most of them women with lived experience, began to self-identify on this board, which has such a profound and influential role for the county’s reentry population.

“It’s been incredible to know that there are other people who are justice-impacted,” said CAB member Azi Carter, who herself is justice-impacted.

That is what compelled Nicole Green, CAB’s first chairperson with lived experience, to seek and receive approval to re-join the board after she had termed out after her first four-year commitment.

“The work was just getting started,” she said. There are other CABs throughout the state with similar purposes. But Green is quick to point out that there are two key differences in Contra Costa County.

“This is the first time where we as a committee have people on the board with lived experience and who are not afraid to talk about it—that’s never happened before,” she said. She also said this the first time the CCP has allocated funds—\$15 million, to be exact—to CAB. “They’ve never done that before,” she said.

Some of the funds will put money behind CAB’s recommendations that seek redress of key service gaps. “Now it’s time for us to ensure those recommendations get implemented properly, not the way everybody else wanted, but the way the population needs it to be, to make sure the community’s voice is part of this implementation,” Green said.

Her vision as chairperson of CAB is, first, to motivate everyone and get them excited about CAB. Second, it is to put focus on past successes and to build on them. Third, it is to remove silos between other county programs and reentry programs.

“If I can remove that separation,” she said, “if I can start getting people to think bigger and start expanding the dots...That’s a success for me.”

Rena Moore, another CAB member, added she would like CAB to advocate for more services for women and bring in new voices.

“I believe that population is underserved,” Moore said. “Most programs are catered towards men. There are a lot of issues with women with children, especially children over the age of five. There are not many programs they qualify for.

We need more members, as well.” Green shared similar thoughts, then added some advice to justice-impacted individuals.

“Don’t be afraid to speak up and advocate on things that you’ve experienced,” she said. “Don’t be afraid to speak up and learn what’s going on within your community and within your world. Be that change for yourself and be that change for somebody else.”

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>

RONELL, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
how to do that prior to her coming along. I already had one son, and he was seven years old when I got clean. Now he’s 39 [years old]. My wife and I had a child together, as well as the two kids that she brought to the relationship. So, I have four kids. I had to learn how to go to parent-teacher conferences, how to get their school supplies together, how to show up for their sporting events, how to support them on spelling bees, and how to plan vacations and go to amusement parks. None of that was present before I got with her. So, I learned a lot about life: how to operate and be a consistent person and continue to move in a positive direction every day, every night, every morning, every evening.

“I learned how to parent through that process, because I didn’t have a manual or a parenting guide or a workbook. There was none of that. Prior to being clean and being with her, I was in and out of jail. As much as a good father I was trying to be, I was fairly inconsistent. I was doing time and I didn’t have a lot of skills in [parenting]. So I developed them, I applied them, and now I have kids that have never seen me take or ingest any substance other than regular food and juice their entire life. I was able to be an addict and then have kids who never even experienced that about me at all.

“When I do workshops, when I talk about reentry, when I speak on all this stuff, I talk about the strength that’s gained through refusal. Anything refused, I gain strength over it. So when I’m talking about cheating on my wife or substance use, lying about this and that, anything that I used to do that I don’t do anymore, I gain strength around it as I refuse to do it. I’ve had a friend ask me, ‘Why is it that you don’t cheat?’ I say, ‘I gained strength over it by not doing it.’ If

you succumb to it, you feel weak. Your strength around refusal becomes tough to do because the act [of refusal] is rewarding. I also know the consequences around it are, for me, unacceptable.

“I can’t afford to lose my family. I don’t want to lose my family. So, I try to talk to myself prior to those acts. You can’t control your thoughts, but you can control your actions. Instead of me worrying about what I’m going to say to somebody after I’ve made a mistake, how about I talk to myself prior to a mistake and then I don’t have to have a conversation with somebody about how I’m remorseful and how I should be given a second chance. I have enough of that in my life. My whole thing is about prevention. I’d rather be on the offensive than on the defensive.

“I don’t want to be in jail trying to convince a judge why I shouldn’t be locked up. I should just, maybe, not get locked up. That’s more convincing to a judge: I don’t want to be locked up because I’m not committing crimes. There’s a couple of things that will get you locked up. If you can avoid those, you’re probably in pretty good shape. I’m trying to have a mindset of ‘don’t start nothing.’ Once you find out that the control and the power lies within, then it’ll start to make sense. Then you can be more responsible and more in your own decision-making. You have to start somewhere and then start gaining confidence through your actions.

“My advice about reentering society: first, it’s important to give yourself a break—don’t put a time limit on your success. A lot of guys come home and the first thing they think is, if something doesn’t happen in 30 days then I’m going back to what I know. I have no real answer as to why we do that as ex-offenders, but we think we have to play this catch-up game. It’s not true. That’s the second [advice]. I would take

suggestions somewhere along the line. We think we know what’s best for us, but our best thinking got us in the situation that we’re in. You’re a grown person—you can do what you want to do. They are suggestions; consider them. If somebody’s been out here all their life and never been to jail, they might have a nice little formula for...if nothing else, they’re out of jail. I get they might not be fly, they might not be gangster, they might not be a lot of things, and they still might be making tons of mistakes. But one thing they discovered is how not to go to jail.

“You have to start understanding that some people can give you advice, even though they haven’t been where you’ve been. Somebody who got out of jail and stayed out, they’re somebody who you could probably try to follow. But other people, too. It’s easy to say, ‘Oh man, you ain’t never been to jail. You can’t help me.’ That’s not necessarily true. I think it’s a mistake to assume that only people who’ve been to jail can really have empathy for you or understanding for you. I’m going to take my cues from whoever’s willing to advise me or share with me or support me. I’m trying to find a formula and that can come from any equation that’s on the table. Don’t turn down everything based on assumptions.

“There’s no right and wrong way about passion. The support of the community is always needed and, hopefully, folks who are formerly incarcerated can provide, be an asset, and be part of the solution for the community going forward. That’s the job of reentry change agents. It’s to try to get a segment of our population back into society in a way it becomes an asset and not a liability.”

To close out his interview, Ronell, ever the DJ, chose “For the Love of You,” by The Isley Brothers (whose song lyrics are on the back page).

Reentry Community Block Party

Photos from Contra Costa County’s annual event, which had over 20 local services, resources, employers, and supporters, as well as food and live music




Clockwise from top left: Community members; Men and Women of Purpose team; Community Advisory Board Chair Nicole Green and Reentry Success Center Site Manager Tiffany Anaya; member; partners and providers.






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

“For the Love of You,” by The Isley Brothers

Driftin’ on a memory
Ain’t no place I’d rather be
Than with you
Lovin’ you

Day will make a way for night
All we’ll need is candle lights
And a song
Soft and long

Glad to be
Here alone with a lover unlike no other
Sad to see
A new horizon slowly comin’ into view

(Chorus)
I wanna be living for the love of you
Ah, yes I am
All that I’m giving is for the love of you
Alright now

Lovely as a ray of sun
That touches me when the morning comes
Feels good to me
My love and me

Smoother than a gentle breeze
Flowin’ through my mind with ease
Soft as can be
When you’re lovin’ me

Love to be
Ridin’ the waves of your love
Enchanted with your touch and
It seems to me
We could sail together in and out of mystery

(Chorus x2)

Paradise I have within
Can’t feel insecure again
You’re the key
And this I see

Now and then I lose my way
Using words that try to say
What I feel
Love is real

I might as well
Sign my name on a card
Which could say it better, time will tell
‘Cause it seems that I’ve done just about all
That I can do

(Chorus x2)

Every day, I’m living for the love of you
Lord knows I am
Write that down
I’m living for the love of you

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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1	2	4	3	8	6	7	5	9
7	3	5	2	9	4	8	1	6
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Contra Costa Reentry VOICE is published quarterly by the following organizations:



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Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360
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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