

VOICE

Issue 26 / 2025

Come to the Welcome Home Reentry Resource Fair and Block Party and unveiling of the newly renovated Reentry Success Center @ 912 Macdonald Avenue, Richmond July 25, 10 :00 am - 3:00 pm!

REENTRY PROFILE

Marco is a son, a father of three children, a light, and a peer navigator at Rubicon Programs' Center of Reentry Excellence (CORE) in Alameda County. His interview took place on a sunny afternoon in CORE Oakland.

Tell us about yourself.

I grew up in a single-parent household, living in subsidized housing. It's really crowded. There's a lot of anger, a lot of hostility, and a lot of sirens and fire trucks. You're always hyper-vigilant about what's going on around you, because it could affect you. If you aren't aware of what's going on outside your doors, it's going to affect you.

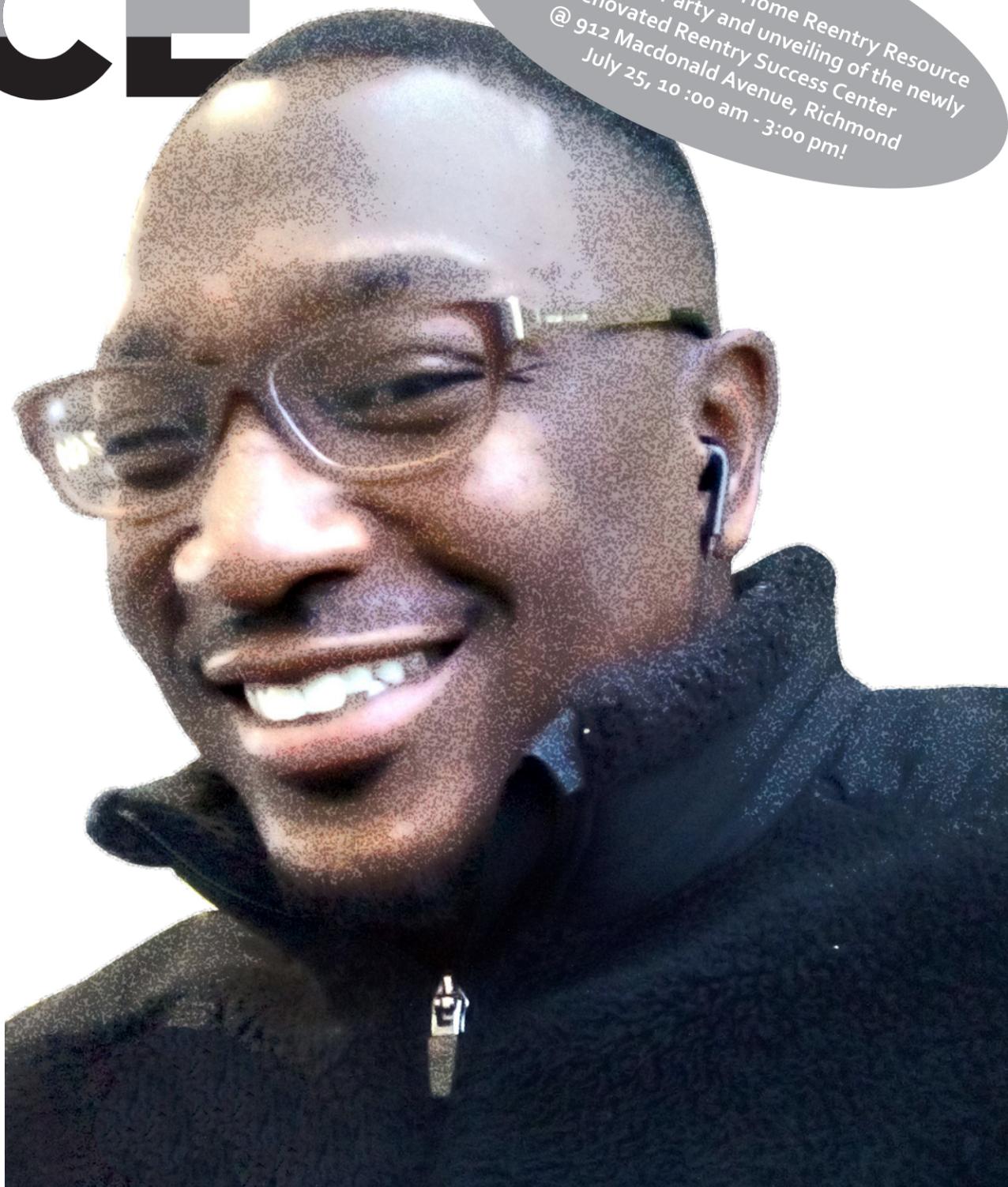
I'm one out of five siblings. That made me who I am. I'm the middle kid. You don't get to pick your family. You deal with the cards you're dealt.

School got me to see what the status quo was, through assignments like family lineage. Those assignments opened up my eyes to families. How come these families aren't together? What about my family? I started looking and seeing what was similar. I looked at my skin and looked at other people's skin. They also have a similar family type: divided, single parents.

I would travel from Vallejo to Berkeley, so I could go to a Berkeley Unified school, because going to a school in your neighborhood could actually bring stuff into your home. There was unwanted interactions, because a lot of kids my age were into shenanigans, throwing rocks and causing trouble. If nobody in the house had any money, and everybody's on welfare, and nobody's really trying to work, then nobody's going to teach. My mom thought it was best for me to go to Berkeley Unified instead of where I was actually living, and use my grandmother's address.

Even though my mom had her struggles—I don't care what none of my siblings say about my mother—she made sure to take care of every one of our individual personalities. It's so much harder than what it seems on the surface, raising five kids. She worked for the post office for a long time, and then she lost everything, became disabled. The mail fell on her back. It was a tough time for us, seeing her transition from being an upbeat person going to parties, going to events, and doing things, to seeing her whole life stop at a wit's end. [That accident] impacted each and every one of us siblings. It was, like, 'Wow! You could be doing everything, have a career, have everything lined up for you, and then a mail sack falls on you.'

I was in elementary school, third grade. I noticed the difference. My mom was a really happy, jovial person. Going through that kind of trauma impacted everybody. When she wasn't able to provide for us and give us that support, she was really hurt, but tried to make it seem like she wasn't hurt. **CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**



DID YOU KNOW

"Justice-Impacted": Would you claim it?

In 2020 the term, justice-impacted, first showed up in this newspaper. Prior to that year, numerous new words were being used. The term, felon, felt terribly outdated, reductive, and punitive. So groups had come up with alternatives, such as formerly incarcerated, justice-involved, and returning citizen.

A series of informal conversations led to the term, justice-impacted, so we ran with it. Five years on, however, does justice-impacted still feel...true?

Why does one word, one term, even matter? Actually, it matters a great deal. In this issue alone, people used "justice-involved," "indigent," and "justice-impacted." Who creates the word—and owns it—is more important than ever.

What word, term, or label would you prefer to stand behind and claim as your own? Send in your idea—one word or term that you would wear proudly—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, We're excited about the stories you'll find in this issue. You'll read about Marco, whose reentry journey took him to the steps of the Reentry Success Center and on to becoming part of the Rubicon team. You'll find program updates on two invaluable county partners that not only get the work that needs to happen, but are also ready, willing, and able to do so and do it collaboratively.

These days there's a lot to be concerned about in our cities, counties, state, nation, and the world. What would happen if, as Marco shared in his story, we came at it with positivity? What a difference that would make, not just for ourselves but also for future generations. As always, please let us know what stories you would like us to write about in the future.

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.

H3 CORE: Closing Gaps in Reentry Coordination of Care

For people living in the streets, Contra Costa County's Coordinated Outreach, Referral, and Engagement (CORE) program provides an important safety net. It supports county residents who are unsheltered and is a coordinated entry point for those seeking housing.

CORE is a program of Contra Costa County Health, Housing, and Homeless Services (H3), a division of the county's Health Services department, which operates four adult emergency shelters: Concord Shelter and Phillip Dorn Medical Respite Shelter in Concord (East County) and Brookside Shelter and Calli House in Richmond (West County).

Since 2019, when the county launched COCO Lead Plus, a point-of-arrest diversion program, CORE has been strengthening its connection to reentry services. It has a number of teams that serve specific segments of the community. One team, for instance, provides direct assistance to low-income families with children that receive CalWORKs. Until recently, it did not have a team working specifically on reentry.

"Over the last five years, we've solidified our partnerships with reentry programs and with other programs that have funding for the justice-involved," said Jenny Robbins, H3's chief of programs and who oversees CORE. "There's a holistic intervention partnership program with the Public Defender's office. There have been other offshoots of reentry funding dedicated to housing, but we never had a dedicated CORE team [doing that work]. So we always had a gap when we had somebody who was being released from the jails and needed to get picked up and go into shelter or go into treatment. Or, if they

had been released and got into housing, but then became unhoused and were having a hard time getting connected to services."

According to Robbins, meetings with the county's Office of Reentry and Justice last year led to program updates that have since filled that gap. Lisa Thomas, CORE's outreach program coordinator, oversees the new reentry team, which consists of two outreach specialists who have lived experience and who are also connected to other county groups.

"We're able to assess them while they're in custody, and we're able to put up a support system for them upon release," Thomas said.

What we're trying to do is figure out how we can work more seamlessly moving forward.

"They don't have to come to us. We'll go to them. A lot of people when they first get out and they're homeless on the street, they're in an encampment and they're not able to get from A to B. We will go and meet them where they're at and provide that extra support, if need be, to go to a different agency."

"What's changed over five years is that our approach is really housing-focused," Robbins added. "The level of care coordination the team is providing and the work we're doing is not just street outreach, where we're handing people survival supplies and food. It is in-depth coordination of care, not only with CORE but

with the other providers that we're working with, to make sure that everything is sewed up before they land, wherever that destination is."

Changes being proposed by the federal government and at the state capital will likely shift priorities further. Robbins acknowledged the approach by the county is multi-pronged. "We're working this out," she said.

"What we're trying to do is figure out how we can work more seamlessly moving forward," Robbins said. "Lisa has been doing a lot of that work, navigating those conversations with detention. I think for me, the relationship-building and getting our information into the community and to different areas of the community to know how to reach CORE is very important. It really is this balance of outreach, education, and relationship-building."

Robbins and Thomas highlighted two easy options for people to get connected. For individuals who are in custody, they said Detention Health had reached out to them to start doing housing resource groups every week, to share information about the services available upon release. For individuals who are already out of custody, there is 2-1-1, accessible by phone. (Simply dial 2-1-1 to get connected.)

"Press option 4, for a reentry dispatch," Thomas said, "but you could push whichever one you feel fits your criteria." She added: "They would do an assessment over the phone and then dispatch you to the reentry team or a team that is available, if reentry team is not available. A lot of times the bed would not be available that day, but we would offer you alternatives, like utilizing the warming center, until we can."

For more information on CORE, submit an inmate request through the Adult School Game Plan for Success. To get connected with CORE directly, aside from 2-1-1, go to <https://tinyurl.com/5wawrkwg>

MARCO, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

But you can't wear a mask 24-7. I was the closest son to her. I would always be, like, 'Mom, what's wrong?' Then she would break down and start crying. Having that kind of relationship with my mom makes me a lot more aware of what other people are going through.

There was a large amount of time that I was separated from my family—seven or eight years in which I went off on my own. I chose to make my own form of income, and I chose to be outside of what's going on with the family. I didn't ask nobody for nothing. It was all me having this really independent mindset. Things happen. Instead of the mail falling on my back, like with my mom, I made some life decisions and choices with relationships that felt like the mail fell on my back, but in a different way. I became justice-impacted.

You mentioned choosing to be away from your family. What led to that decision?

Like I said, you can't choose your family, and circumstances don't necessarily define who you are. I remember the day clearly. My birthday was literally that same day, and my mom just had it up to here because there were some guys she chose to spend her time with that were unfavorable. I shared my opinion, because of how it was negatively impacting us. Instead of taking time

to absorb and evaluate what I was bringing to her attention, she was like, 'Get out! Find your own way and leave.'

I'd just turned 18. I didn't have nowhere to go, so I had to make certain decisions. I went to this community center and they recommended that I go to Calli House (in Richmond). I took six buses to finish high school. After my mom put me out, I didn't always have the right way ahead of me, but I just knew that I came from good people in their best life. Life be life, and it just happened that she was impacted that way and became a different person. I was hurt that I was kicked out, but I didn't take it personal because she was only doing what she knew how to do, and she didn't know how to communicate with me very well at all.

What happened next?

I got married at 19 to someone I met at Treasure Island Job Corps, after high school. I have three beautiful kids. They're very well taken care of. All are in honor roll right now. So me and her, we have a great relationship, even right now. We're divorced. I didn't have a father to get an understanding or guide or mentor [my fatherhood]. I didn't have none of that. I kind of bumped my head a lot. But I know how to resolve things. I want to role-model how I'm supposed to deal with things. I came from trauma. So, for my

children, I didn't want them to see any of it.

That's how me and the mother of my children were able to have an understanding and agreement, because she knew my background and I knew her background. One thing we never backed away from is that they were never going to experience that kind of trauma or arguing. I'd rather us be in separate homes before it's like that, ever. We've held true to that.

Describe yourself in one word.

I would definitely say, 'Light.' It's been a really rigid, misty, dark, dingy path. No warmth, just the complete opposite. So many hardships. You could barely tell, but I have scars on my face from some of the hardships and things. I see myself in the mirror every day. Now I could breathe a little bit easier. But I remember each and every one of those dark moments because they taught a profound lesson about how life could be. I've been through depression. I've talked to people that have been suicidal. I've witnessed people being morally harmed and bodily harmed. I get to wake up every day and work out every day, literally in testament to the fact that I still can.

There's a light shining right behind you.

(Laughter fills the room.)

You completed the Alpha program through the Reentry Success Center. What was your

Contra Costa Public Defenders: Representing Whole Personhood

Contra Costa Public Defenders (CCPD) has roughly 130 staff, 58 percent of whom are women, 35 percent of whom are people of color, and its staff roles range from attorneys and investigators to clerics. Most readers of this newspaper have a connection to this department. (The work of CCPD is directly tied to the word “justice” in the term, justice-impacted.) In the court system, public defenders ensure anyone accused of committing a crime that they, too, have access to safe and fair legal representation. CCPD’s website states its mission clearly: “Our overriding goal is to serve the best interests of our clients in everything that we do. We tirelessly fight for all our clients and ensure that each individual receives excellent representation.”

Angelene Musawwir is not an attorney. She is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and the first hired on in 2013 to serve as a forensic social worker under then-Contra Costa Public Defender Robin Lipetzky. Her role was and continues to be unique. There used to be a time when a holistic approach to coordination of care and justice was more of an outlier than the norm. But then, Musawwir explained, CCPD “decided to embed a social worker.” She listed a few California counties that also have on-staff social workers in their public defender’s office: Alameda, San Francisco, Solano, and Yolo.

“The idea,” she said, “was to expand the department’s ability to network with other community-based agencies, understand how social welfare systems work, so we could connect our clients to things, like if they were having issues with Medi-Cal or housing or substance abuse treatment. The idea was to bring in the

social worker who has that knowledge base and that expertise. That’s what social workers do.

“We have the ability to build rapport and get information and create relationships with individuals, because of how we’re trained. I think [CCPD] was like, ‘Okay, we have an opportunity to have a social worker that would be available to all the attorneys and to really be a key part of our holistic client center services.’” She spotlighted CCPD’s holistic intervention program, which connects its early representation program and case management, as one example.

Now under the leadership of Public Defender Ellen McDonnell, Musawwir manages 14 social workers in the department’s client services unit. All of them work alongside attorneys. “We also

Creating trust with different communities is really important right now.

work with a lot of community-based agencies,” Musawwir said, “and also county-based agencies to make sure our clients have access to what they need.”

Musawwir said the Reentry Success Center and HealthRIGHT 360 are important to her work. “We refer our clients to them,” she said. “As forensic social workers [in CCPD], we meet with our clients. They’re in custody. They’re somewhere in their criminal justice journey. They’re either being arraigned, charged, in custody, serving a sentence, or being released. Our job—what we do—is we meet with those clients wherever they are in their case. We do a needs assessment

with our client. ‘What do you need?’ ‘Would it be beneficial if you were to leave today?’ ‘How do you build community so you don’t find yourself back [in custody]?’ We try to lower recidivism rates.”

With changes in the federal government and at the state and county levels possible on the horizon, Musawwir said she feels determined to continue making positive strides in the right direction. Of her team’s work, she said, “I think it’s going to be even more instrumental.”

“I don’t know what’s going to happen with the funding sources we get to support social welfare,” Musawwir said. “Creating trust with different communities is really important right now. The folks who have the knowledge and access to resources also have to be mindful that people might not just come to you saying, ‘I’m looking for help.’ ‘I need this.’ ‘I need that.’ You might have to make yourself more available, and you might have to work with groups that you don’t always work with, so people know that whatever service that you have is safe and will keep them safe.

“People in my position are going to have to make ourselves more available in community settings, whether it’s community-based agencies or it’s faith-based agencies. We have to really educate ourselves on what’s going on. And we have to go out of our way just to become more in tune to what other agencies are doing, too.

“Our office is always trying to be on the front line. Our attorneys are people who are really community defenders—that’s probably a better word for them. This is a strange climate that we’re in. It’s actually a climate that’s spawning fear in people. Social workers need to make sure that they’re informed on what’s going on and how people are reacting and how to make sure people get connected to what they need. We have to know that, but that’s what we should be doing anyway.”

experience?

[The Reentry Success Center and Alpha staff] are so transparent throughout the program. They’re just, like, ‘I’m a person and you’re a person. Your opinion matters. Your emotions are valid.’ This was the first time I felt like somebody sincerely encouraged that kind of growth in my life. You don’t get that in school. You don’t get that in all those different programs.

I had no idea what to expect. I’m a harsh critic, especially if it’s something that’s portraying to be this and it shows up not to be that. But it was the exact opposite when I walked in. It became more and more of what I didn’t know I needed to hear. But I was okay being uncomfortable. You have to be uncomfortable and willing to be uncomfortable to learn something. I had to be willing to look at myself and allow other perspectives to help me form my own perspective and not feel like I was being challenged.

Vaughn put great emphasis on the lesson plans and the Alpha curriculum. The way he broke it down made it seem like it was all applicable. This is not just something that he talked about. He said he used this curriculum, and I believe him. I went through two cohorts with him [as my teacher]. That was a big part of the inspiration to keep me going forward, because when I used to talk through hard moments with my mom

prior to going to Alpha, things would never click. Nothing ever resonated. By the end of Alpha, she heard me. She let me know that she heard me, and she also let me know what she wanted to say in response, because she didn’t properly hear me prior. We became closer with how we talk. I feel like I can talk to her now.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

I want to talk about the birth of my daughters. With my oldest daughter, I had the baby backpack packed with everything we would need, and I was so ready. I was also trying to find work. It was a really turbulent time. Night came and [my wife] went into labor. I said, ‘Cool. We’ve prepared for this. I have the bag. Got the keys to the car. All we need to do is get you out the bed.’ As soon as she took one step off the bed, she went into labor. By the time the EMT came, they had the little razor. They were like, ‘You want to cut the umbilical cord? Look, we came up here to deliver the baby. It looks like it’s already done.’

With my youngest daughter, we went to the hospital. The room they gave us was covered in dirt. I was like, ‘Okay, my child’s about to be born. What’s going on?’ [My wife] was pushing the button on the bed, but the cord was unplugged from the wall. I walked to the head nurse and I spoke with her. I said, ‘Can someone come and clean the room? The bed was unplugged. Can we

get some assistance?’ She just rolled her eyes at me.

Instead of reacting, I came back and told my wife that things are going to be okay. ‘I already went to the head nurse. I’m going to go get them in a moment if they don’t respond.’ No response. The doctor came and he was like, ‘I’m coming right now.’ We came in there. Now, mind you, all the nurses were supposed to help. He asked them, ‘Why isn’t nobody helping this man?’ They stood there with their arms folded.

He was like, ‘You know what? Someone get this man a jacket.’ So they brought me a white jacket, and I stood next to the doctor in front of my wife and I delivered my baby girl. I followed his instructions and he was like, ‘You take it from here.’ He stepped back and said, ‘Give her one big push.’ And there was my baby, right there. And to see the faces of the nurses. One of them started crying.

Most of them were white. The one Black nurse that was there before I went and got the doctor was like, ‘Don’t make a fuss in here. They already told me they’re going to call security on you.’ And I was like, ‘Thank you for your advice, but I’m going to advocate for me and mine.’ I have no expectancy that something is going to arise. I’m going to come at it with positivity, and I’m going to follow instructions to try to get things done.

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 Circles

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

THURSDAYS (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

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

"The Bigger Picture" Workshop

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 Ceremony

Celebration on Friday, July 18, 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

"The Path Not Taken," by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden back.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

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

		2	9					4
9	5	8		3			7	
4	7	1						5
	2	6	3	9	5			
5								9
			2	4	1	7	5	
2						8	4	1
	8			6		5	2	3
3					2	9		

© 2013 KrazyDad.com

ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

7	6	3	4	2	1	5	8	9
9	2	4	3	5	8	1	6	7
1	5	8	7	9	6	3	4	2
5	4	6	1	3	9	2	7	8
8	9	7	2	4	5	6	1	3
2	3	1	6	8	7	9	5	4
6	8	2	9	1	4	7	3	5
3	1	5	8	7	2	4	9	6
4	7	9	5	6	3	8	2	1

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



Reentry Success Center
912 Macdonald Avenue
Richmond, CA 94801
reentrysuccess.org



Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360
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