

MAY 2022

# RCM

RETURNING CITIZENS MAGAZINE

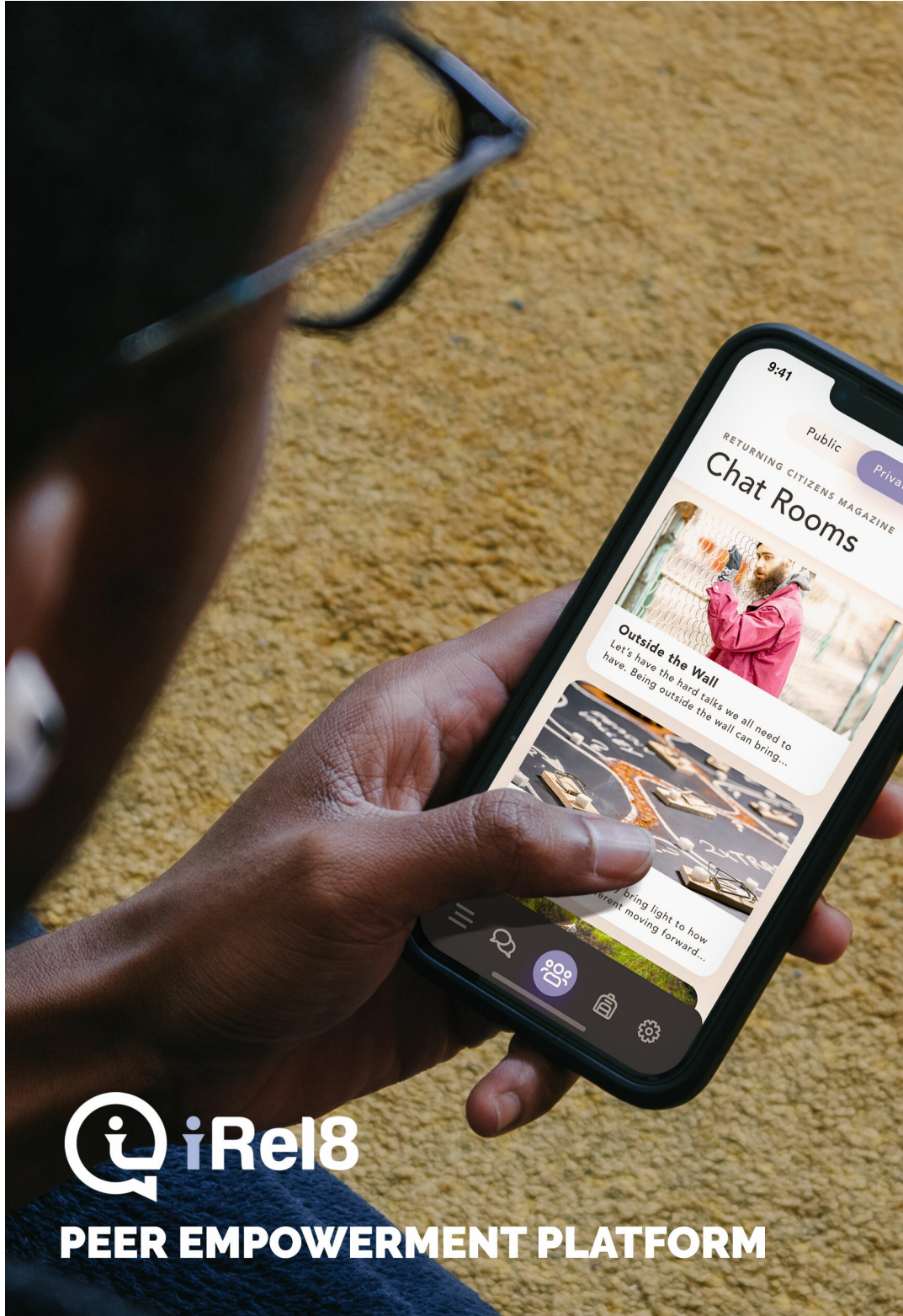
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE JUSTICE INVOLVED COMMUNITY

## The iRel8 App

**An anonymous app used to privately talk with other individuals experiencing similar mental health challenges. Positively contributes to users mental wellness. Always safe and confidential so you can be 100% open.**



**PEER EMPOWERMENT PLATFORM**



**THE FOUNDER OF A CHANCE FOR CHANGE AND HER JOURNEY**



**HOW FOOD AND DRINKS AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**



**REENTRY RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH**



**LEARN ABOUT THE PROFESSION OF A FLAGGER**

ReturningCitizensMag.com

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We LOVE hearing from our readers! Share your thoughts on a article you've read or a subject you would like for us to cover in future editions. Tell us about a touching, inspiring or life-changing experience in your life.

Month-after-month, you have spoken and we've shared your voice in every edition of RCM. Know that every letter we receive motivates us to work harder for the successful reentry of the justice-involved community. Send your letters to:

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info@returningcitizensmag.com



# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Dear Friends,

I want to take this time to recognize all the women that care for our children while their husbands and/or significant other repay their debt to society. And equally I want to recognize the men who have stepped into the role as Mom while their wife and/or mother of their children repay their debt to society. You all are not recognized enough for your sacrifice and the mental strength you display day in and day out while you all care for your loved ones. I can only imagine how you must feel not being able to celebrate Mother's Day 2022 with your entire family. Please know that the Returning Citizens Magazine staff salutes you. Our prayer is that you and your family are reunited soon. In the meantime, keep your head up because change will come.

Happy Mother's Day!

Until the next issue,

**Todd**

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# INTRODUCING:



**An anonymous  
peer-empowerment  
platform to give and  
get real-world  
advice.**

As fellow human beings we share many commonalities including our ongoing pursuit for well-being. Well-being is made up of several areas contributing to our overall health such as physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. Now, we obviously all have brains and at some point, you will likely face a mental health problem/event during your lifetime.

Statistically, 1 in 5 individuals will face a mental health challenge in any given year; however, 5 in 5 are impacted. Friends, family, and those around someone living with mental illness unquestionably feel the impact. Untreated, these brain-based conditions can negatively

affect thinking, emotions, behaviors, and relationships.

Sadly, people living with mental illness struggle and have difficulty thinking, feeling, and/or acting in an appropriate way. For those suffering with mental illness, this means experiencing extreme and unexpected changes in mood—like feeling more sad, worried, and alone. For others, it means not being able to think clearly, not being able to communicate with others, or having bizarre thought patterns.

Unlike other general physical illnesses, mental illnesses are related to problems that start in the brain. Changes based on life experiences can cause stress, trauma, lack of sleep, and nutrition—which can negatively impact a person's brain. Generally, when someone has a mental illness, life has changed and the way the brain works has also changed. The good news is there are many ways to work through a mental illness and not all require medication.

To be clear, having negative feelings and thoughts does not mean you have a mental illness. To be diagnosed with a mental illness, the negative changes in thinking and emotions have to:

1. Seriously affect your ability to do things you want to do (what doctors call pervasive); and
2. Stick around for longer than it should (what doctors call persistent).

Changes in mood or negative feelings coming from life changes, like moving to college, losing friends, or grief are not mental illnesses – they



# AN APP WITH A SAFE ANONYMOUS WAY TO GET AND PROVIDE HELP TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD SIMILAR LIFE EXPERIENCES

are a normal way of dealing with life circumstances. However, for some people who experience extreme life circumstances (like trauma or significant stress), a mental health condition can develop and become a mental illness if not addressed and treated.

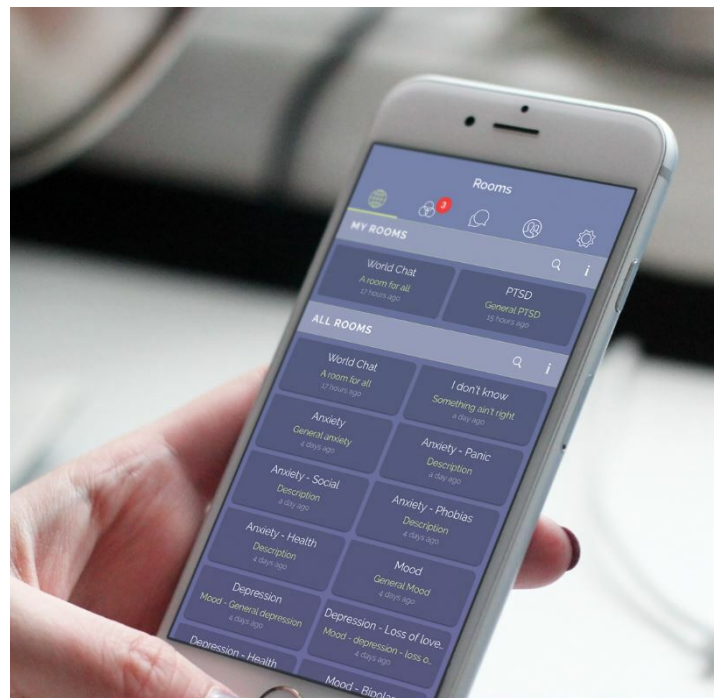
As the CEO of Returning Citizens Magazine, I encounter Veterans, the incarcerated, and formerly incarcerated suffering from a mental illness on a routine basis. In our quest to provide mental health resources for this demographic, we met with App creator “iRel8”. Founders Dion and Jeff creators of the iRel8 App after hiding mental health issues from each other—even though they were great friends and have worked together since 2010. They both concealed their challenges until Jeff was transparent one night and shared a story of how he prevented a suicide with a stranger in a Facebook group they were in. Jeff didn’t know this person but reached out and saved his life just by talking and being there for him. As they say the rest is history and iRel8 was born, an anonymous place where peers can talk to one another, be vulnerable, and give or get support without fear of stigma, losing a job, or having their reputations ruined.

I was very excited to have met with the creators of iRel8. We quickly determined that we needed to join forces to make their App available to the masses in support of mental health. Our magazine and 2nd Chance TV on the Roku TV platform have partnered with iRel8 to push content to the confined population and the incarcerated/formerly

incarcerated Veteran community. Men and women have shared that being incarcerated has negatively impacted their mental health.

So, you are probably wondering how this App could help confined men, women, and Veterans. What I like most about the iRel8 App is that the confined population can communicate anonymously to help and heal one another with challenges they are experiencing with someone anonymous that is going through the same situation. Additionally, it’s not social media. Anyone using the App can maintain their confidentiality while chatting with one another.

This App is going to be a game changer for jails and prisons that house men, women, and Veterans allowing them to pour out their souls





— a more human approach —

## MENTAL WELLNESS CHAT APP

with like-minded individuals without the risk of judgment or being betrayed as we constantly see on social media.

Our main priority with partnering with iRel8 is to help our communities and to keep the cost as low as possible to use this App. The App can be used with a smartphone 24/7.

Users will find that only an email address is needed to register and log-in to find like-minded individuals needing someone to talk to. The app contains “rooms” which are topics focused on mental wellness like post-traumatic stress, addiction, financial well-being, COVID-19, and many more. Users’

data is not harvested and sold to third parties. iRel8 doesn’t display ads or allow trolling.

Users can also form groups with like minded peers who want to connect on a more frequent basis, and, like most social media platforms, you can friend those you are comfortable with.

As a Marine Corps Veteran and someone who works closely with the incarcerated population, I think socializing this app is the right thing to do. **Use code RCM to get the app for only \$0.99 per month.** Let’s share the iRel8 app with our family and friends because they are also mentally incarcerated with their loved ones until they are released.

To Learn More About iRel8 Visit:

**[www.iRel8.org](http://www.iRel8.org)**

Visit your App Store and download the app use the code **"RCM"** on your Apple or Android smartphone to start chatting today.



# LET'S BUILD A NEW BEGINNING

## COURSES OFFERED

### Business Start Up

learn how to start and maintain a profitable business

### Freelancing

learn the ends and outs of work-from-home freelance opportunities

### Life Coaching

get guidance on how to achieve the next chapter of your life

### Social Media

build step-by-step skills in social media for social and business use

**Many topics to choose from!**

## FEATURING

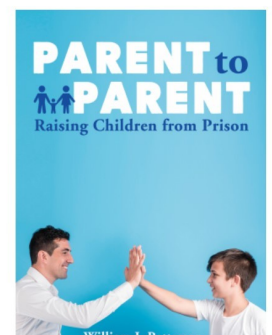
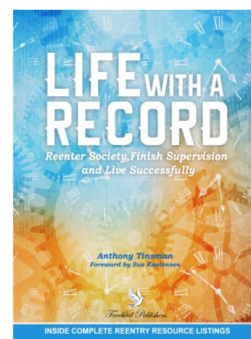
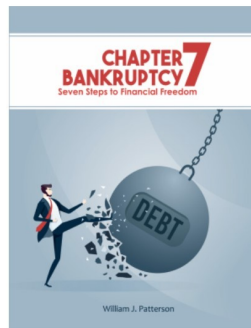
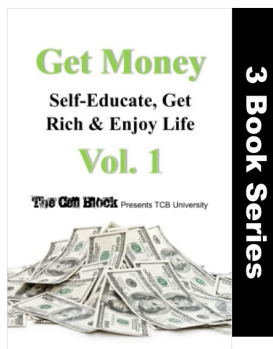
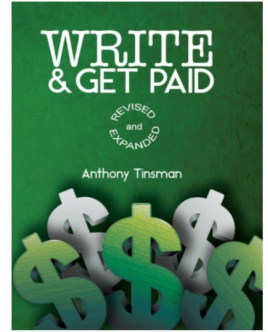
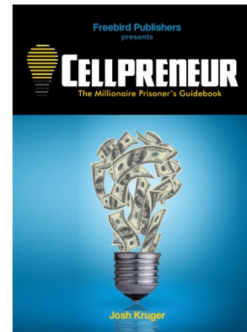
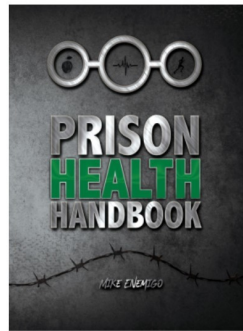
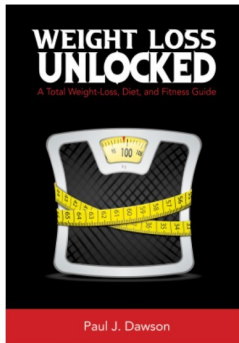
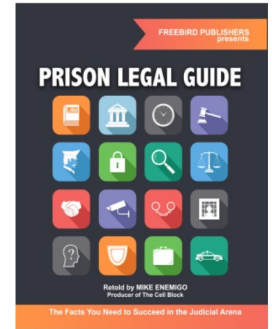
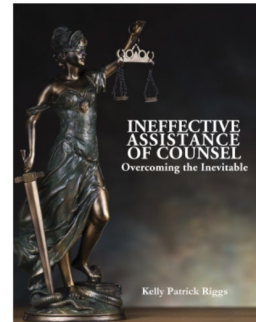
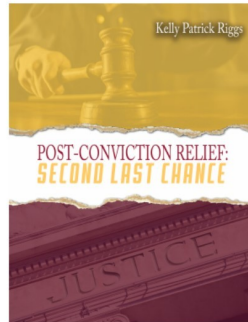
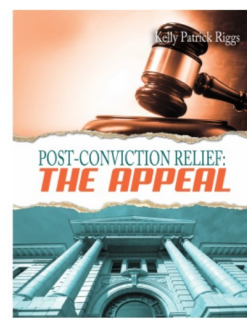
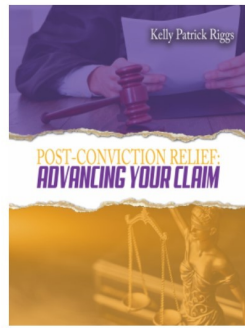
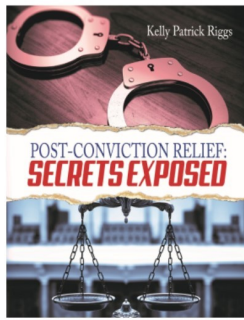


The ReEntry Toolkit is your ultimate reentry resource designed by reentry specialist! You'll get over 100 videos to assist with the transition back into society. Take courses at your convenience. Your ReEntry Toolkit includes resources for:

- government entitlement programs
- assistance with basic needs (housing, food, clothing, etc.)
- finding your local reentry center
- finding treatment centers
- help with family integration
- and so much more...



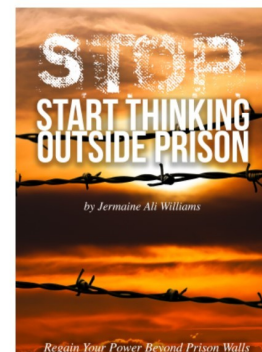
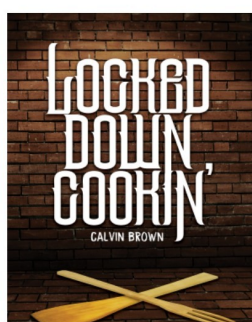
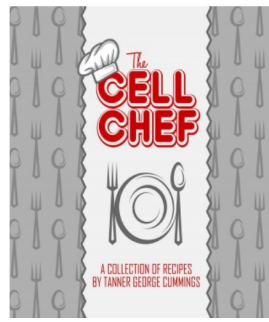
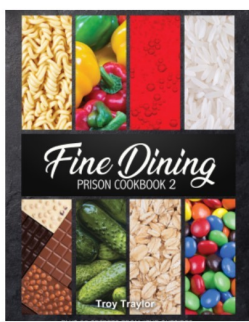
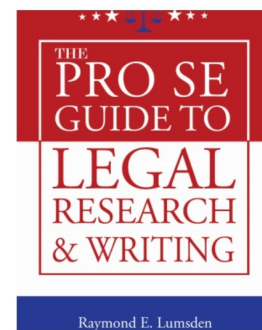
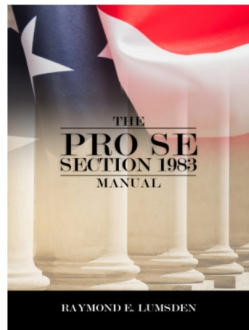
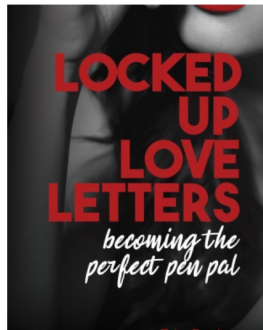
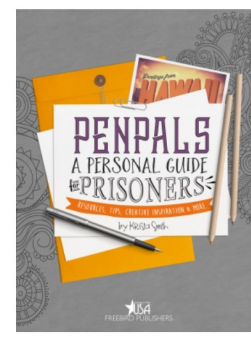
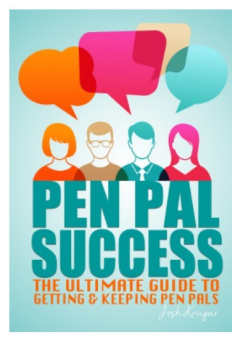
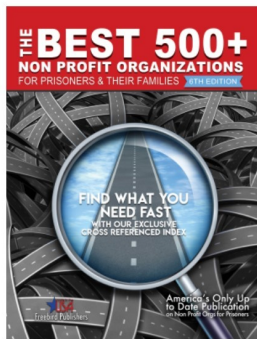
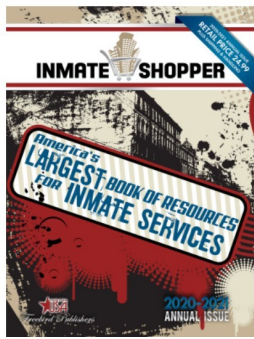
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# AMANDA COLEMON: HER JOURNEY TO A CHANCE FOR CHANGE

*Interviewed by Todd Dubose*



**RCM:** Amanda, thanks again for agreeing to be in our magazine and for allowing us to share your story with the returning citizens community.

**Amanda:** Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me.

**RCM:** What did being homeless mean to you?

**Amanda:** Being homeless meant we were in a position where we didn't have access to resources that I am normally accustomed to. Especially with my work experience. I'm a social worker, probation officer, just an advocate and a resource liaison. When I transitioned to Charlotte, things were totally different. Limited resources, an unexpected budget cut in the school system, which is the position that I originally moved there for.

Their Medicaid system was completely different. The biggest struggle with homelessness was that my mother had end stage renal failure since the age of seven, I believe. And so, I've always been her primary caregiver. But I found myself being unable to get access to those resources, to get her medical treatment. And so, homelessness put us in a position where we moved into a family homeless shelter. By definition or expectation, I was viewed as someone who didn't look like the normal homeless person.

**RCM:** I'm familiar with what you're speaking of.

**Amanda:** Yeah. and so, when it came to that, I faced a lot of discrimination with the Resident Assistants at the shelter. Homelessness, it was something that was unfamiliar to me. So, I took it very hard because I've always been able to help so many other people. I found myself and my family with two small children and an ill mother, unable to get necessary the resources. I experienced a lot of shame and guilt because I was now homeless.

But I'm a fighter and so I didn't give up. I knew that I had to tap into that gift that God gave me as being resilient and resourceful. But it was the tragic event of losing

your best friend, your mother while living in a homeless shelter. That defined homelessness in a totally different aspect because that's where I began to give up. A few days afterwards her death, we actually were kicked out of the homeless shelter because we didn't meet the qualifications any longer because we were no longer a family unit. It was just one adult and two children.

**RCM:** So, when your mother passed away, you weren't considered a family anymore?

**Amanda:** No. And they kicked us out two days later.

So, then homelessness transformed into helplessness because now this family homeless shelter is saying that we no longer qualify. The hospital's calling because they need to know what to do with her body. I had 48 hours to pack up the little belongings that we did have.

Once we were kicked out of that shelter, we lived in my car for about a week until a coworker at a restaurant I was working at, opened her home to us. Still, again, homeless by living on the floor of someone's home, but that just looked totally different. So not only was I unable to grieve the passing of my mother but I had to make sure that I had my kids in their same school, going to school every day.

I later took another position as a social worker who was homeless trying to get back and forth to work and through training all while trying to familiarize myself with the resources and to grieve which I didn't do. So, at that time, that's when I got heavy into substance and alcohol use. Losing my mom was very traumatic, especially in the way that we lost her.

When we were in the homeless shelter, if you ask the children, they felt like it was a slumber party. My mother was the type of person who drew everyone to her. I remember begging and pleading with the director, "I just lost my mom - where are we supposed to go?" So, it wasn't just a loss for myself or for my children, it affected everyone at the shelter. Honestly I think that was another reason that we were transitioned out



of the shelter. The impact that her passing had on the entire program was disrupting so I was told. So, it wasn't just a loss for myself or for my children, it affected everyone at the shelter.

So, homelessness started from hopelessness to desperation and then to becoming a fighter. So, it took about, I would say, six to eight months to find my first house and then my house became the new shelter. I was still of course in contact and had great friendships with the other families from the shelter, so, I opened my doors to them because I knew what it was like being at that shelter.

And so, the families would come as many as I could pack into a two-bedroom house. That was the start from my experience of homelessness, being able to find housing and then really continuously to this day of being able to open my door to those who were experiencing the same thing.

**RCM:** I understand you're a Christian. The Lord obviously has a day that he's going to call us all home. I like to think that when he called your mom home that he wanted you to dive into his work at the same time, he wanted you to go through the fire so to speak. You went through the fire, and came out stronger.

**Amanda:** Right.

**RCM:** Have you had an opportunity to grieve the loss of your mom?

**Amanda:** I put my daughter in KinderMourn. My son was too young and I attempted several times with GriefShare for myself. I have their book. I think KinderMourn had referred me the first time. I attempted four times to do the program. I swear it is an amazing program. The trauma was so bad that I could start maybe the first two or three classes and then it was too much. I mean, I literally tried Griefshare for the four years that we were in Charlotte. To be honest with you, no, we still haven't gone through the grief process. Part of my grief process became standing up the "A Chance for Change" organization in her honor.

When the doctors took her off of life support, I remember whispering in her ear that we were going to be okay and that it was okay for her to let go. I promised her that she didn't have to worry that me and the kids were going to be fine. As soon as I said that, her eyes closed and doctors came in and said she had passed.

I kept that promise and I've continued to fight. In the midst of not going through the grief process, I drank a lot. I was never a drinker. I was always taking care of my mom and raising my daughter. For a year, I was drinking. It was maybe like a pint of something a day.

When I went to a doctor, they told me that I was alcohol dependent. My body started having reactions when there wasn't alcohol in my system. I didn't know anything about what alcohol could do to you. I was actually looking for help. The idea was to move back to

Virginia and I was going to go into a rehab facility, to be honest.

I'm working as a social worker, as an investigator at that time and helping other families and I'm not able to help myself. So that would always back track my grief process and a lot more guilt. One day I had a stroke at age 29. I spent two weeks in the stroke unit. I remember calling my son's school director and it was almost like an out of body experience because I thought I knew what I was saying.

The director was on the other line. I just remember her saying, "I need you to go upstairs and get your supervisor and have them call 911." When I got upstairs, I guess everything was so slurred that they immediately knew I needed help. That's when they had said it was a stroke from stress.

So, I took a year off of work. I had a big battle with trying to get time off from the job to recoup. It was a hardship of no income. Then that trauma coming back again are we going to be homeless now? Do I pick, continuing to work or my mental health? My last week at the hospital there was a Chip Ingram book with a Bible and I had never heard of Chip Ingram before. I started reading it and that was the turning point for me. At that moment it really transformed my relationship with God. I knew that God was tapping into the purpose that he had over my life. When I got released from the hospital, I focused for about eight months on physical, occupational and speech therapy about three to four times a week. Then that's when I really dived into deepening my relationship with God with prayer and then those worries were lifted.

God started providing a way and there was no income. The closer that I got with Him, the happier and the more at peace I became. My symptoms went away. I started feeling a lot better. From that moment in 2018 is when I decided to go ahead and come back home, because Virginia Beach is home for my son especially because he was born here. His dad is ex-military, we met here and so stability was Virginia. We came back and I took a position as a director of social services at a rehab facility. I question that for a while because it was like you just lost your mom, is this going to be too much? Because you don't want to be at work crying every day.

**RCM:** Sounds like you were looking for a distraction.

**Amanda:** I always look for a distraction. I love to stay busy. I love to be working, working, working so that I don't have to focus on reflecting back to what we went through. But it did the opposite. I found myself thinking about it a lot. I was always really, really good at social work and a caring person. I even worked with the elderly population or those who were in hospice, I wasn't given the proper tools on how to deal with grief or someone passing, I wanted to make sure that I would be a good resource or support person for families.





I never wanted anyone to not know that one being angry, sad, mad is okay. Even questioning God, that's normal. Those are things that I didn't know about losing when I lost my mom. For two years, I thrived at my position until it became less about those who were at the facility and more about dollar signs. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore.

So, I was already working on building A Chance for Change and doing research and that's when I came across Governor Norton's second chance act. My biggest thing was now that I'm back in Virginia, I got to figure out what I missed in five years. How much has changed? What resources are out there? Where is their lack of resources?

**RCM:** Why returning citizens? I mean, I guess you could have gone a lot of different directions, right?

**Amanda:** To be honest, I never knew my biological father. Other than what my mom, who's not here anymore and my grandmother told me. Other than that he was a bad man. My father spent 33 years out of my 35 years incarcerated. For some reason there was always some type of draw to those who were incarcerated and coming out.

When he first got paroled out, I actually found him on Facebook. Everyone said stay away from your father. He's just a bad man. It's almost like when you tell a child not to do something at times they do the opposite. I want to do the opposite. I wanted to find out.

They're certain traits in myself that I know didn't come from my maternal side. I had always dug and looked up his cases and things. I liked to try and get to learn about who he was. When I found him, we had a relationship via telephone. He knew the organization that I was starting. I was doing my background research on who my father is. Then I found out exactly who he is. Then things started to click on why there was a draw towards returning citizens.

As we started a phone relationship, I saw the damage and almost the institutionalized personality that he had from transitioning out in addition to addiction. Back when I was born in the eighties, nineties, there were certain diagnoses that are now prevalent and available for us to see that some things are genetic especially when it comes to your DNA make up and mental health.

Those things started to click for me. He wasn't provided with the appropriate support - he wasn't ready and also didn't have access to the supportive resources that are needed for somebody to be successful.

**RCM:** Most individuals that are incarcerated, they do suffer some form of PTSD.

**Amanda:** Yes. He was ex-Navy and when he was 18, he had a traumatic event that occurred where he was raped in the military, and that's where his PTSD and really criminal behavior started.

**RCM:** You wanted to know his side of the story.

**Amanda:** I wanted to know what this is about and why I have this trait. I didn't know why I was going in a certain

direction. I was just very focused on returning citizens when I was doing my research. I found with Governor Northam's Second Chance Act that there were very few resources in the Hampton Road's area and it was more prevalent in the northern area of Virginia.

**RCM:** I'm starting to understand why you chose to work with returning citizens. So, what do you like most about working with returning citizens?

**Amanda:** When I first got housing from being homeless, that sensation of hope and achievement and we did it. I mean, I think we literally slept on brand new carpet and were so excited. That is the same feeling or hope that I see in returning citizens that we work with.

When they call, it's just like "oh my God, there's someone that actually cares that's doing this type of work." I mean, I will literally just maybe have my shirt on or I'll be somewhere and someone will say, "hey, what do you guys do?" When I tell them, it's just the expression that they get of just hope and the fact that there's somebody that will listen. That's not just clinical. They can feel the fact that I actually want to be able to help and I can help. I can put you in the direction of those who can help you. And that is the best reward. And I know that is why God placed us back here in Virginia specifically for. There have been a lot of times that it's been so hard financially, I wanted to quit. Literally, God will send someone by, it could be a janitor that just knocks on the door, just to get the trash and they ask "hey, what do you guys do?"

The person will say, "Oh, my goodness. I just got out two days ago and I've been trying to get help." It's those moments where it's like I know God is saying, "no, you may want to quit today but that's not what you've been crafted for."

And so being able to give hope and to help people feel like they're not alone during this transition, whether it's a family member or a friend, that's literally what A Chance for Change is about.

**RCM:** Okay. So, what are some of the services that your organization provides?

**Amanda:** So, since 2019 when we opened, we provide mental health, substance abuse, and outpatient therapy services. We have a clinical supervisor who is Dr. Robinson. She showed me the ropes when I was fresh out of undergrad. So, when we reconnected and everyone found out that I was back in the area and what I was doing, everybody was all on board.

And whether it was volunteering or just coming together to brainstorm, that became really the pivotal moment of what we need in the Hampton Roads area and how we can connect the dots and get the justice involved resources and providers together. Also using the tools and the relationships that I had already had. Really just connecting and letting everyone know that this is what I'm doing now. And how can we continue to support, reconnect and things like that.

**RCM:** Okay. Did you have any difficulties getting started?

**Amanda:** Yes, we've had a lot of difficulties. The biggest was in the beginning. When it comes to reentry there is a lot of politics. So, there are certain organizations that we now have relationships with where funding is given whether it's for a for-profit or non-profit organization. But yet I found that there was still a need for help. So, if these organizations are getting backed with the funding, why is there such a need or where's the disconnect? That I can't figure out.

**RCM:** How did you guys come up with the money to actually get a house or building to have your services?

**Amanda:** So, at our private practice, I ended up meeting a gentleman who's a real estate broker. We were having meetings at the building and a lot of lawyers or different business owners were kind of, "hey, what do you do?" When we provided the opportunity to have our detailed, well-researched business plan reviewed. For our year one projection to year five projection, I pitched the fact that housing is a huge need. He gave me - our partnership, my first opportunity for a chance to get a building and put the entire plan in action. I had the opportunity to see the program that I had developed, the research that it was based on, and what the program would look like. We did a two-year lease just for renting. Every month for two years under A Chance for Change.

**RCM:** Now, is this an office setting or home setting?

**Amanda:** This is a home setting. So, it's a two-bedroom house and with just getting licensed and how the program is designed, I wanted to give it a very family home feeling, but also something that was transitional. My goal is if you transition out of incarceration, you're given the tools to tackle the various obstacles. We created a treatment plan of what independence looks like for you between 30 days to six months of service. At 75% for a measurable outcome and our goal, you should be able to do our program and transition out to your own and then open the door for the next individual.

**RCM:** Fantastic! I learned that you are graduating from law school. So how are you paying it forward after finishing law school?

**Amanda:** Well I started operating A Chance for Change and seeing the amount of time that individuals were getting for certain charges, even down to our peer recovery and what the old law looks like versus the new law. Then our parole board, it gave me the drive to want to see what kind of difference I can make in the judicial system.

I can only do so much from the outside, but I'm very strategic. Call that a blessing of my work experience in working in the system. I jumped in and applied and wanted to see how I could make a change with our laws. I got into law school. I took my first class and I then noticed that I was good at it. I was not only good at it but I could also see how much advocacy could be beneficial for the population that we serve.

**RCM:** You're part of it now.

**Amanda:** Now we're part of it. The Masters of Law program is a two and a half year program that I finished

in 12 months. That's when I started to see that there was something there and this is something that can really not only just benefit myself but also to benefit the organization and those that we serve. Because now I can advocate it and educate on how to not go back or what our laws look like.

**RCM:** What do you want to say to our readers before we close out this interview?

**Amanda:** I guess the biggest thing is that there is a place who will support you, who advocates for you, who will fight for you as long as you're willing to commit and be ready for that change and the work that you have to put in for a successful recovery.

**RCM:** Amanda, can you give our readers your contact information?

**Amanda:** Absolutely. So, our office is located at 223 East City Hall Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia office suite, 331. The recovery house that we currently have up until November is also in Norfolk off of Johnson's Road.

Our phone number is 757-908-3503. Our fax is 757-908-3504. You can find our website at [www.Chance4Change.org](http://www.Chance4Change.org) and you can email us at [info@chance4change.org](mailto:info@chance4change.org).

**RCM:** Okay. 've enjoyed speaking with you, Amanda, thank you for sharing your story. It was a pleasure to have met you and we appreciate you sharing your journey with us.

**Amanda:** Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity. That's exactly what we're here for. So, thank you for listening.

**RCM:** You're welcome.

*Amanda would like to give a special thank you to a few local organizations that support A Chance for Change:*



# FOOD, DRINK, AND MENTAL HEALTH

*Adapted from [healthdirect.gov](https://healthdirect.gov)*

It is important for everyone to eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on their intake of alcohol and caffeine. For people with mental health challenges, this is even more important because:

- eating and drinking healthily may improve some of the symptoms of mental health disorders
- unhealthy eating and drinking habits may make symptoms worse
- some foods, caffeine and alcohol can interact with the medicines used to treat mental health disorders

## How does intake of food and drink affect mental health?

### Food

There is some evidence that:

- a healthy diet (high in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes; moderate amounts of poultry, eggs, and dairy products; and only occasional red meat) is associated with a reduced risk of depression
- omega-3 fats can improve mental health. These are found in oily fish like tuna, salmon, mackerel, perch, herring and sardines, and in smaller amounts in white fish such as cod, bass, haddock and snapper. 2 to 3 meals a week of oily fish will provide enough omega-3
- diets high in refined carbohydrates such as snack foods) can increase the risk of symptoms of depression

We do not know exactly why diet affects mental health, but it could be due to changes in blood glucose (sugar) levels, inflammation, or effects on the microorganisms that live in the gut (known as



microbiome). Eating well also prevents some chronic diseases like diabetes, which also affect mental health.

Being overweight or obese can contribute to mental health disorders. Some medicines for mental illness also cause weight gain, which adds to the problem. Losing weight through better nutrition and exercise can improve mental health.

Eating habits can also affect sleep and therefore mental health. It can help to have your main meal 2 to 3 hours before bed. If you're hungry, a piece of fruit or a glass of milk is the best bedtime snack.


Some foods interfere with the medicines used to treat mental health disorders.

Some examples are:

- Foods containing high levels of tyramine (particularly foods that have been aged, matured or fermented such as aged cheeses or cured meats) should not be eaten if you have been prescribed a type of antidepressant called a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI).
- Grapefruit and grapefruit juice interferes with many medicines including some taken for mental health disorders.
- If you change your salt intake if you are prescribed lithium can significantly change the level of lithium in your blood.

Supplements can sometimes be helpful but they are not always necessary. They can have side effects and can interact with medicines for mental health disorders. For example, St John's Wort can be dangerous if taken with some antidepressant medicines. You should talk to your doctor before taking supplements and always tell your doctor what supplements you are taking.



A close-up photograph of a white ceramic bowl filled with fresh fruit. The bowl contains several ripe red strawberries, some whole and some sliced. There are also several raspberries, a few slices of orange, and a sprig of fresh rosemary. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the same fruits. The overall lighting is bright and natural, highlighting the textures and colors of the produce.

**Studies have  
compared  
"traditional" diets,  
like the  
Mediterranean diet  
and the traditional  
Japanese diet, to a  
typical "Western" diet  
and have shown that  
the risk of depression  
is 25-35% lower in  
those who eat a  
traditional diet.**

*Data from Harvard Health Publishing: Harvard  
Medical School. 3/26/2020 Nutrition  
Psychiatry: Your Brain on Food*

## Water

For good mental health, it is important to drink plenty of water. Water is needed to make neurotransmitters, the chemicals that transmit signals between brain cells and hormones that control the processes of the body and brain. Even mild dehydration can make you irritable and affect mental performance.

## Alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant. While it can make you feel good for a while, drinking too much alcohol can affect your mental and physical health. In the short term, drinking a large amount of alcohol (binge drinking) can lead to psychological effects such as impairing your judgment or causing you to deliberately harm yourself or others.

Long-term use of alcohol increases the risk of depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders. It can also lead to dependence and addiction, especially in people who have depression or anxiety, and it can increase the risk of suicide.

Alcohol also affects sleep and therefore mental health. It can make you feel drowsy and help you fall asleep, but often negatively affects your sleep during the second half of the night. Alcohol can interfere with how well some medications work, and increase their side effects such as drowsiness and dizziness.

## Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant that acts on the brain and nervous system. It is found in coffee, most teas, cocoa, chocolate, cola, guarana and energy drinks.

Caffeine might have some positive effects on mental health. For example, it might help with depression by reducing inflammation in the brain. But caffeine is addictive, and many regular coffee drinkers become dependent on it.

Caffeine can increase anxiety and alter sleep patterns in some people. It is recommended that you avoid caffeine for at least 4 hours before going to bed.

Caffeine can also interact with some medications used to treat mental illness.

## How can I improve my eating and drinking habits?

People with mental health disorders can use the same strategies as everyone else to eat a balanced diet, drink enough water, and limit their intake of caffeine and alcohol. However, some people with mental health disorders might have more difficulty than others because of:

- lack of motivation
- loss of appetite, or comfort eating
- using drugs or alcohol as a coping strategy
- irregular meals
- feelings of isolation
- financial insecurity

If you are struggling to eat and drink more healthily, these strategies might help.

- **Mindful eating:** If you concentrate on what you're eating, you will probably eat more healthily. For example, people who eat while watching television tend to eat too much at one sitting. Practicing mindfulness and being aware of what you are doing has its own benefits.
- **Healthy food swaps:** It can be easier to make small changes than big changes. They're more likely to stick. Swap white breads for wholegrain breads. Swap the frying pan for the grill.
- **Going easy on yourself:** Change doesn't usually happen overnight. Take small steps to improve your food and drink intake, make changes and practice positive self-talk.

Some of those changes will be easy, others will be harder. You'll stick with some, and not stick with others. In time, they will become healthy eating habits that come naturally.

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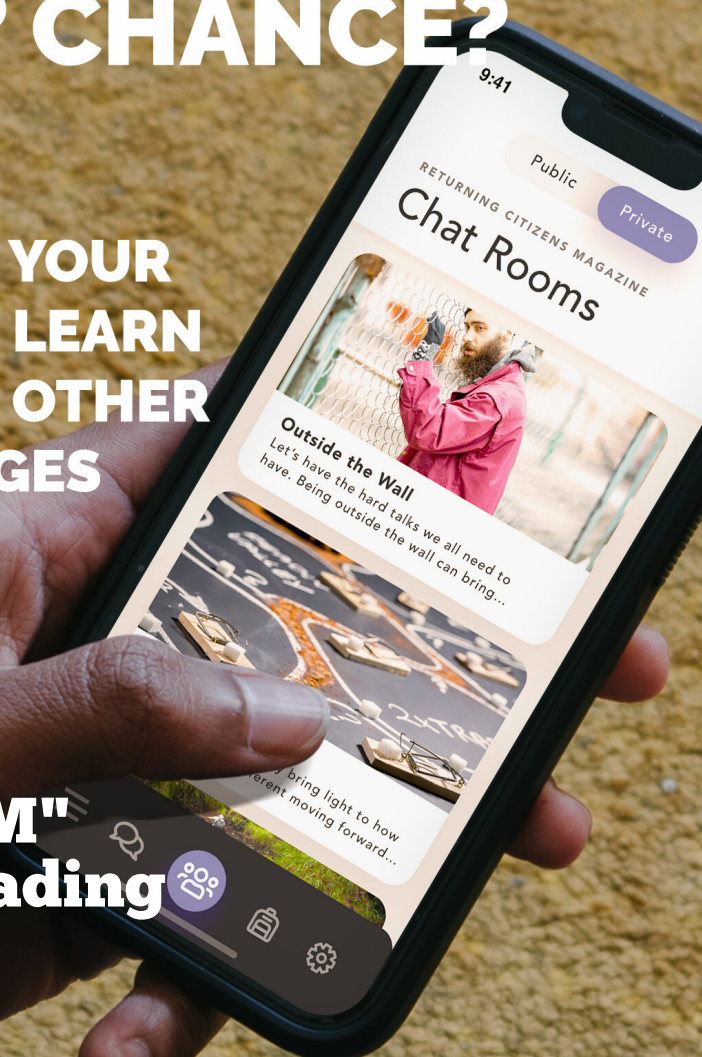
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## Reentry MythBusters

[Reentry MythBusters](#) are a first product of the Federal Interagency [Reentry Council](#). They are essentially fact sheets, designed to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families in areas such as [public housing](#), access to benefits, [parental rights](#), [employer incentives](#), Medicaid suspension/termination, and more. As you will see, some federal laws and policies are narrower than is commonly perceived, as is the case with [public housing](#) and [food assistance benefits](#). In several policy areas, states and localities have broad discretion in determining how policies are applied and/or have various opt-out provisions for states ([TANF](#) and [child support](#) are examples here). In some cases, statutory barriers do not exist at all or are very limited, as is the case with [federal hiring](#). In fact, some federal policies and practices contain incentives for assisting the formerly convicted population (i.e., [federal bonding](#) and [tax incentives for employers](#) hiring formerly convicted individuals).

So who are the Reentry MythBusters helpful for?

- **Prison, jail, probation, community corrections, and parole officials** – who want to ensure that individuals can access federal benefits, as appropriate, immediately upon release to help stabilize the critical first days and weeks after incarceration. Pre-release applications and procedures are available for certain federal benefits ([Veterans](#), [Social Security](#), [food assistance](#), and [student financial aid](#)).
- **Reentry service providers and faith-based organizations** – who want to know how to access the laws and policies related to [public housing](#), [SNAP benefits](#), federal [student financial aid](#), and [Veterans](#), [Social Security](#), and [TANF benefits](#). The Reentry MythBusters also describe [child support](#) options, [parental rights](#) while incarcerated, and the [appropriate use of criminal histories in hiring decisions](#).
- **Employers and workforce development specialists** – who are interested in the [incentives](#) and [protections](#) involved in hiring formerly convicted individuals. The Reentry MythBusters are also helpful to employers (including [federal agencies](#)) who want to better understand the [appropriate use of a criminal record](#) in making hiring decisions.
- **States and local agencies** – that want to understand, modify, or eliminate certain bans on benefits ([TANF](#), [SNAP](#)) for people who have been convicted of drug felonies.

Additional Reentry MythBusters are under development and will address juvenile justice issues, among others.

Questions? A [roster](#) of the Reentry Council staff working group is available on the Reentry Council [website](#), as is additional overview material about the [issue of reentry](#) and an [the Reentry Council activities](#) to date.



# REENTRY MYTH

# BUSTER!

*A Product of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council*

## On Federal Hiring Policies

**MYTH:** The Federal Government's hiring policies prohibit employment of people with criminal records.

**FACT:** The Federal Government does not have a policy that precludes employment of people with criminal records from all positions.

The Federal Government employs people with criminal records with the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities.

Consistent with Merit System Principles, agencies are required to consider people with criminal records when filling positions if they are the best candidates and can comply with requirements.

Individuals seeking admission to the civil service must undergo an investigation to establish suitability or fitness for employment. The principal issues for agencies as they consider hiring people with criminal records involve making determinations related to:

- An individual's character traits and conduct to determine whether employment would or would not protect the integrity and promote the efficiency of the service.
- Whether employment of the individual in the department or agency is consistent with the interests of national security.
- The nature, seriousness, and circumstances of the individual's criminal activity, and whether there has been rehabilitation or efforts toward rehabilitation.

People with criminal records are eligible to work in the vast majority of federal jobs. For a few positions, they may not be deemed suitable or fit for the job, depending on the crime committed.

- A handful of federal laws, like those prohibiting treason, carry with them a lifetime ban on federal employment.
- Others, like the criminal statute for inciting a riot, prohibit federal employment for a certain number of years.
- Previous criminal conduct could potentially render an individual incompatible with the core duties of the job.
- Previous criminal conduct may also affect an individual's eligibility for a security clearance, depending on the level of clearance being sought and the nature of the conviction.

Excepted (Schedule A) Appointing Authority permits employment of individuals in work-release programs when a local recruiting shortage exists.

- Allows agencies, with OPM approval, to employ inmates of federal and state correctional institutions.
- Appointments limited to one year.

### For More Information:

Regarding Federal Regulations, visit: [www.gpo.gov/fdsys](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys)

For Suitability Determinations Criteria, search under 5 CFR 731.202

For Excepted Service Disqualifying Factors, search under 5 CFR 302.203

Regarding the Bond Amendment, visit:

[http://www.dss.mil/about\\_dss/press\\_room/2009/bond\\_amendment.pdf](http://www.dss.mil/about_dss/press_room/2009/bond_amendment.pdf)

Regarding Federal Background Investigations, visit:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigate/>

### What is a REENTRY MYTH BUSTER?

This Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets intended to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Another 9 million cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the social and economic costs are high -- more crime, more victims, more family distress, and more pressure on already-strained state and municipal budgets.

Because reentry intersects with health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well-being, many federal agencies are focusing on initiatives for the reentry population. Under the auspices of the Cabinet-level interagency Reentry Council, federal agencies are working together to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

For more information about the Reentry Council, go to: [www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council](http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council)



# REENTRY RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

*Adapted from SAMHSA.gov*

**AT A GLANCE** Individuals with mental and substance use disorders involved with the criminal justice system can face many obstacles accessing quality behavioral health service. For individuals with behavioral health issues reentering the community after incarceration, those obstacles include a lack of health care, job skills, education, and stable housing, and poor connection with community behavioral health providers. This may jeopardize their recovery and increase their probability of relapse and/or re-arrest. Additionally, individuals leaving correctional facilities often have lengthy waiting periods before attaining benefits and receiving services in the community. Too often, many return to drug use, criminal behavior, or homelessness when these obstacles prevent access to needed services. The Office of National Drug Control Policy reports:

- More than 40% of offenders return to state prison within 3 years of their release.
- 75% of men and 83% of women returning to state prison report using illegal drugs
- More women returning to state prison report using illegal drugs compared to men.

SAMHSA efforts to help meet the needs of individuals with mental and substance use disorders returning to the community, and the needs of the community include:

- Grant programs such as the Offender Reentry Program (ORP) that expand and enhance substance use treatment services for individuals reintegrating into communities after being released from correctional facilities.
- Actively partnering with other federal agencies to address the myriad of issues related to offender reentry through policy changes, recommendations to U.S. states and local governments, and elimination of myths surrounding offender reentry.
- Providing resources to individuals returning from jails and prisons, behavioral health providers and criminal justice practitioners, communities and local jurisdictions, and state policymakers.

At federal, state and local levels, criminal justice reforms are changing the landscape of criminal justice policies and practices. In 2015, federal efforts focused on reentry services and

supports for justice-involved individuals with mental and substance use disorders have driven an expansion of programs and services. Reentry is a key issue in SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. This strategic initiative addresses the behavioral health needs of people involved in - or at risk of involvement in - the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive public health approach to addressing trauma and establishing a trauma-informed approach in health, behavioral health, criminal justice, human services, and related systems.

## **Resources for Individuals Returning From Jails and Prisons**

### **SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Locator**

Search online for treatment facilities in the United States or U.S. Territories for substance abuse/addiction and/or mental health problems. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

### **Self-Advocacy and Empowerment Toolkit**

Find resources and strategies for achieving personal recovery goals.  
<http://www.consumerstar.org/resources/pdf/JusticeMaterialsComplete.pdf>

### **Obodo**

Find resources and information and make connections in your community. Users set up profiles, add photos, bookmark resources and interests, and can email other members.  
<https://obodo.is>

### **SecondChanceResources Library**

Find reentry resources and information  
<http://secondchanceresources.org>

### **Right Path**

Resources and information for persons formerly incarcerated, and the people who help them (parole officers, community service staff, family and friends). <http://rightpath.meteor.com>

All publications are available free through SAMHSA's store <http://store.samhsa.gov/>





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**MYTH:** An employer can get a copy of your criminal history from companies that do background checks without your permission.

**FACT:** According to the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), employers must get one's permission, usually in writing, before asking a background screening company for a criminal history report. If one does not give permission or authorization, the application for employment may not get reviewed. If a person does give permission but does not get hired because of information in the report, the potential employer must follow several legal obligations.

### Key Employer Obligations in the FCRA

An employer that might use an individual's criminal history report to take an "adverse action" (e.g., to deny an application for employment) must provide a copy of the report and a document called ***A Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act*** before taking the adverse action.

An employer that takes an adverse action against an individual based on information in a criminal history report must tell the individual – orally, in writing, or electronically:

- the name, address, and telephone number of the company that supplied the criminal history report;
- that the company that supplied the criminal history information did not make the decision to take the adverse action and cannot give specific reasons for it; and
- about one's right to dispute the accuracy or completeness of any information in the report, and one's right to an additional free report from the company that supplied the criminal history report, if requested within 60 days of the adverse action.

A reporting company that gathers negative information from public criminal records, and provides it to an employer in a criminal history report, must inform the individual that it gave the information to the employer or that it is taking precautions to make sure the information is complete and current.

If an employer violation of the FCRA is suspected, it should be reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The law allows the FTC, other federal agencies, and states to take legal action against employers who fail to comply with the law's provisions. The FCRA also allows individuals to take legal action against employers in state or federal court for certain violations.

### For More Information:

See ***Credit Reports and Employment Background Checks*** from the Federal Trade Commission  
(<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/credit/cre36.pdf>).

The FTC works to protect consumers from violations of the FCRA and from fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace, and to educate them about their rights under the FCRA and other consumer protection laws.

To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

Watch a video, ***How to File a Complaint***, at [ftc.gov/video](http://ftc.gov/video) to learn more.

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For more information about the Reentry Council, go to: [www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council](http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council)

# THE INCARCERATION COACH

What's  
Your  
Game  
Plan?

## THE INCARCERATION COACH: THE REAR VIEW



Johnny Branham

One of the most important things that you need to remember is how to forget. I know that sounds like a contradictory statement, but we must truly develop a short memory when it comes to certain things in our past. I call the past our rearview and it is impossible to drive while looking in it. The past is meant to be our teacher and reminder as to where God has brought us from. I know the temptation while incarcerated is to tell stories about the past to pass the time or reminisce. I believe that it's proper to give others a glimpse into your past if it is truly your past because it's a part of your testimony but there is a danger when we somehow think that the past is better than our present or future.

I believe one of the greatest mistakes I have seen men and women make when exiting prison is not having a plan. I always advise people to go to a different area altogether and meet new people. If you are going back to the same neighborhood where the same old influences reside then it could have a pull on you. If you are going back to the same people who you got in



begin with, then that is not wise. I know in some instances it's an old girlfriend or boyfriend or children that are involved but if you don't get "you" together then you won't be any good for them anyway. I have a ministry that helps men and women transition and unfortunately more often than not the ones that decide to go back to their hometown and friends end up succumbing to temptation.

I believe that oftentimes the best way to achieve success, whether living life inside as a resident or back in society, is to leave the past in your rearview and focus on your windshield. You must change people, places, and things. This may require getting out of your comfort zone and embarking upon new territory with new faces and places. You don't need to hang out with your old friends from the past, you must make new ones. I ask you this question, "If you weren't feeling well and had to vomit, how many of you would collect that same vomit in a bowl and eat it like soup?" I know that sounds absolutely disgusting right? And yet that's exactly what the Bible says we do when we go back to foolish behavior. It says, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly. Proverbs 26:11 (KJV)

God told Abraham to get out of his country and away from his kinfolk to a land that he would show him. Simply put, God told him to leave everything he knew in order to receive a blessing. Some of you reading this have a blessing that is waiting for you in unfamiliar territory and with unfamiliar people. Your freedom may hinge upon you walking away from some people you've known your whole life, but it is most certainly necessary and worth it. The question is are you tired of the life you've allowed the enemy to dupe you into creating for yourself? Are you ready to leave it all behind for what God has for you? The children of Israel complained in the wilderness after being delivered from over 400 years of bondage. They were not in the promised land yet but were not where they used to be. Sometimes we get impatient while waiting on God to change our circumstance when God is waiting to see the circumstance change us. Don't look back at the bondage of drugs, the love of money, sex, lust for power, deceit, etc., and think that somehow that was better than where you are now. Incarceration is more than a physical location and freedom is more than the absence of barbed wire fences.

Take the time today to look at the beautiful windshield that God has given you that represents your future. The time that you have to create new ideas, serve others, and be a blessing to those around you. You are planted where you are right now for such a time as this and God does not make mistakes. You have an assignment that only you can complete, and it requires that you look outside of yourself. When the automakers designed cars, they never intended the rearview mirror to be what we use to drive forward. In the same way when God gave us the ability to reflect, he did so not with the intention that we would use our memories to destroy our future. What lies ahead of you is of greater importance than the past. They call it the present because it's a gift so cherish it and live it on purpose.

# INMATES TO ENTREPRENEURS



## INTRODUCING: RIDE RETURNING CITIZENS INSPIRED TO DEVELOP ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES CENTER



The mission of the Entrepreneurial Development and Assistance Center (EDAC) is to connect budding and existing entrepreneurs to resources for venture management and growth. EDAC is a part of the Division of Academic Outreach and Engagement at Morgan State University. More information is located at [www.edacmorgan.com](http://www.edacmorgan.com). EDAC houses the Baltimore Metropolitan Women's Business Center which is funded through a grant from the United States Small Business Administration. More information is located at [www.baltmetrowbc.org](http://www.baltmetrowbc.org).

Morgan State University through the EDAC received a grant from the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Entrepreneurship Education Program for Formerly Incarcerated Persons. MBDA is committed to leveraging its capabilities to help increase opportunities that formerly incarcerated minority persons face in trying to reenter the workforce. The Entrepreneurship Education Program for Formerly Incarcerated Persons will focus on funding innovative projects to support and equip formerly incarcerated individuals with the skills, resources, and network to start their own businesses.

# The RIDE Center

Returning Citizens Inspired to Develop Entrepreneurial Ventures

## A MONTHLY ROADMAP, RESOURCES & INSPIRATION FOR YOU!

*Ok, this is the year that I move from wearing all of the hats to focusing on growing my business. I need help in making sure I'm on the right path. Any guidance?*

I commend solo entrepreneurs who realize that in order for the business to grow, they have to move out of the way. I also admire the grit that solo entrepreneurs have in making sure that the business continues even with little to no assistance. However, in order to truly sustain and grow, some focus from the founder and some help are required to move the business forward. Consider these tips to help you with growing pains:

Get control internally. Here's an exercise that will help you determine what systems are needed to help in the growth of your business. Write down from start to finish what it takes to move a product or service from the idea to receiving your payment for services rendered. You will be surprised about the amount of follow up, brainstorming, marketing and sales to acquire customers and keep them, building, making, collecting payment, paying bills, well, helpfully, you get the point. As you put together a plan to grow your business, put together a plan to make sure your internal systems are covered by you and a team.

Stop spinning the wheel. I hear this often from entrepreneurs, "I feel like every day I come into the office, I'm spinning my wheels and not achieving anything." There can be many reasons why they feel this way.

With some small businesses, they are chasing the dollar versus having the dollar chase the solution to a problem. Putting together a strategic plan each year and following that plan can help the entrepreneur move forward vs spending the wheel. And, this strategic plan should involve more than one person working to move the plan forward.

Use the time that you have. One of my mentors once said to me that there are three things that cannot be regained... opportunity, spoken word and time. We can always lose money and develop a plan to get more; however, with time, there is no extra time. With that, how are you spending your time each hour, day, week, month in making sure that the business is operational and growing? As opportunities come about for your business, consider your strategic plan and how the opportunity benefits your business. Be the protector of your time!

Continuing education. Consider this tool <http://bit.ly/bbjgrowingpains> to help you work out growing pains.

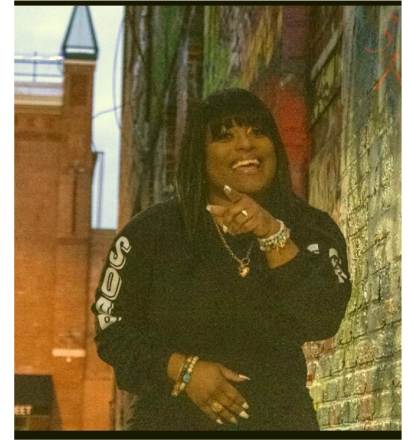


Omar Muhammad  
EN-TRE-PRE-NEUR & Director,  
Entrepreneurial Development &  
Assistance Center at Morgan State U  
[omar@edacmorgan.com](mailto:omar@edacmorgan.com)

MAY 2022



Monthly Spotlight on a Formerly  
Incarcerated Individual Turned  
Entrepreneur



**Name:** Tanisha Murden

**Business Name:** Unique Stories  
Inc.

**Graduate:** R.I.D.E. Program

**Website or Social Media:**

[www.tanishamurden.org](http://www.tanishamurden.org)

**Tanisha Murden**

**Booka\_jones1**

### Advice

*I am you and you are me, no matter  
what it looks like, keep pushing!*

*No matter how hard it is, keep doing  
it!*

*No matter what comes your way,  
walk over it!*

*No matter how many doors close,  
keep knocking!*

*No matter what, you are the only  
person who can stop you!*

More information at  
[www.edacmorgan.com](http://www.edacmorgan.com), click on **RIDE**.

- **RIDE University**, monthly videos on starting, operating and growing your enterprise.
- The **Breakthrough Podcast**
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Funded By





# YOUR PEER LIFE COACH



## WHO IS RECA?



Jason O'Malley

*ReCA's Coaching Project utilizes a distinct niche in that it is a peer-based system and was designed primarily for the participants' transition period to society. The organization is led by successfully restored citizens who intimately understand the challenges and fears that their participants face.*

*With this understanding, we are uniquely positioned to build rapport and facilitate the discovery of their path through obstacles like the ones we encountered and overcame. Perhaps the single greatest asset that the team possesses would be that participants can relate to us through common experiences, and therefore they allow themselves to open up answer the questions we posit in order for them to dig deep within themselves to succeed in life.*

As Re-entry Coaching Academy (ReCA) continues to define itself as an organization, this question is at the center of all transformational moments—both individually with “who am I?”, and collectively with “who are we?” Other follow up questions might be “what are my values?” or “what do I stand for?” And as we endeavor to keep evaluating and evolving as we grow, we refine our greatness by persevering with resolve towards our goals, with resolve towards creating and building up. Let me backup a little, though. The idea for an organization created by and for the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated had its beginning in 2011 when eight men sat in a class with an associate warden in a medium-security federal prison to learn life coaching and the coach approach. One of the incarcerated students wrote a letter to the author of the textbook that we were using, and from that connection, those eight men and the associate warden, a life coach herself, were given permission to use the curriculum to receive the same professional life coach training that participants receive outside of prison. After that initial class, The Institute for Life Coach Training (ILCT), the organization that gave us the curriculum to use, allowed the original eight members to facilitate the succeeding cohorts utilizing the same rigorous training that we had received.

Each succeeding cohort then took on the responsibility of training the next generation in the life transformational tools that coaching offers. We started to utilize the coach approach—which is asking powerful questions with curiosity to help inspire the other to dig deep and start to map out and create a new way of being for themselves. We did this because life coaching taught us that we are the designers of our life and that we know our best path forward, and we believe that about others as well. It was a time when we simultaneously started to believe in ourselves and felt others believe in, encourage, and hold us accountable. With this new way of thinking and being, we started to affect transformation in the prison culture. We were collaborating with staff to create a safe space for the residents to practice new behaviors—behaviors that allow us to grow into our best selves and thrive in life. We were utilizing the new tools on calls and visits with family to help them start to do introspection and gain more balance in their lives. If we could not be there for them physically, we wanted to do our part in their growth as much as we could. These tools that we had been blessed with were helping all of our relationships.

So, we started to plan and collaborate on bringing this new way of being back to our communities: where we had once played a part in tearing down, we would now play a part in building up. We cannot undo the mistakes we have made, but we can give back by helping others to successfully transition home. We can give back by helping our youth so that they don't have to travel the path that we did. We are imperfect, for sure, but we are striving to make a difference, and we will collaborate with anyone who wants to create a system that facilitates the success of others.

In this column titled ReCA, which is the acronym for the company my colleagues and I started, you will hear stories and reflections from the life coaches and stakeholders who have been grinding it out to make a positive impact on the world around them. Topics will include everyday life issues as well as issues that are specific to men and women that have been incarcerated. There will be a common theme of how the coach approach has helped men, who in many instances had very little formal education or tools to function “successfully” in society, to actually thrive in their endeavors. There will also be reflections of struggle and determination that would not have turned out positively had it not been for the tools of life coaching.

So, I implore you: Stay tuned, for we are just getting warmed up!

# INSPIRATION

## Wait It Out

Many might ask in your situation, "how long." In many instances determining the length/time one will experience a drought or remain in a particular predicament is uncertain. The word for you this season is "to wait it out." Yes, wait it out. If you can wait, you can win. Winners can reach deep within and find remarkable grit and stamina to finish well. Some might call it faith, but while reading this anointed word right now, I want to remind you that something special is inside you. This special grace embedded inside you helps you fight through all the obstacles that harass you on every side. The wait might be painful, tedious, and mind constricting. However, know that your creator has an ultimate plan that you have no clue about that will propel you to win and not lose. In the meantime, count your blessings, encourage yourself and others to remain engaged in positive tasks, and always dream of a better tomorrow.

Incarceration was created to break an individual's resolve and humanity. This is a distorted perception of rehabilitation that you cannot accept or adhere to for many. Living in this season of obscurity and unpredictability must be viewed as an opportunity for preparation, not failure. So, start living with the mindset to wait it out. Waiting it out requires you to recognize and be thankful that you are alive. More importantly, your existence is not just to be, but to be active and alive regardless of unbearable circumstances. To wake up every morning focused, accessible, and favored. My brothers and sisters, wait it out, trust God, and remember that morning will come.



Dr. Raymond A. Bell, Jr.





# REVEREND G's WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

SHORT | SWEET | IMPACTFUL

## PURPOSE

*Greetings and welcome to Reverend G's Word of Encouragement, I have a quick word for you today and then I will be out of your way, so let's get to it. In today's world where stories and topics are reduced to headlines or a text, pastors must adjust the sermon length and not the content to keep listeners engaged with the sermon. To this end I am making my sermons available free to you. They are short, sweet and impactful sermons that will encourage you in life's journey. So please listen and share them with family, friends, your church, the office, or your neighborhood hangout spot.*

## WEBSITE

<https://anchor.fm/RGWOE>



## TODAY'S TOPIC — FROM TENTMAKER TO SUPERWOMAN

This month we turn our attention to one of the most attended days in church after Easter and Christmas and that is Mother's Day. First and foremost, happy Mother's Day to each of you. Second, while you may not know it, there are lots of women in the Bible who did extraordinary things in supporting the work of the Lord. That being said I want to tell you about a woman named Priscilla. The Bible states that Priscilla married Aquila and they worked in the tent making business. In short, Priscilla and Aquila were a first century Christian missionary married couple described in the New Testament. They lived, worked, and traveled with the Apostle Paul, who described them as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Yes, I did say tentmaker. However, unless you get the wrong observation, these tents were not the fancy tents you find at your local sporting goods store. No, these tents required hard work because they were made from goat's hair. But Priscilla's work did not stop there because she was actively involved in supporting Paul during his ministry visits. You know Paul who wrote numerous books of the Bible in the New Testament. In fact, Priscilla's efforts to support Paul were no small feat because Paul clearly states what was at risk for her. In Romans chapter 16, Paul states, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." So, as we honor all women of every nation let us not forget that Priscilla was a tentmaker by trade but a superwoman of Biblical strength and courage. Therefore, as you prepare to reenter society go and do likewise with strength and courage.

## BIBLE TRIVIA - TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Who became the queen of King Ahasuerus and defended her Jewish people from being destroyed?

- A. Rebekah
- B. Mary Magdalene
- C. Gomer
- D. Esther

## BIBLE VERSE OF THE DAY — 1 CORINTHIANS 11:12

For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

## INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE — WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Do not settle for average. Bring your best to the moment. Then, whether it fails or succeeds, at least you know you gave all you had. We need to live the best that's in us." — Angela Bassett

# FINANCIAL LITERACY

## BANK VS. CREDIT UNION



**Robin R. Haynes, MBA**  
Financial Strategist  
Business Advisor

Welcome to this month's financial education section. As you prepare to return back into society, I am extremely excited to share with you, financial tips and strategies that will help you both now and in the future.

Last year we discussed the two types of financial institutions which are: *banks* and *credit unions*.

Bank: A bank is a financial institution licensed to receive deposits and make loans. Banks are controlled by shareholders. Shareholders are persons who have considerable stock within an organization or corporation

Credit Union: A credit union is a financial institution just like a commercial bank. A credit union provides exclusivity. Exclusivity means that an individual has to qualify to open an account and become a member.

The main difference between a bank and credit union is that the credit union is not for profit and it is member owned.

Before you open (if you've never had a bank account) or re-open your account with your financial institution, ask yourself "*what is it that I am looking to financially accomplish?*"

Use the space below to answer to answer this question:

A rectangular piece of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The left edge has five punch holes. The bottom edge is irregular and torn, while the top edge is straight.

Now that you have thought about what you are looking to accomplish financially, now ask yourself would a bank or credit union best fit and assist me in what I am looking to accomplish? I strongly encourage you to take a look at both financial institutions to compare and contrast, then determine who (what financial institution) will be the better fit.

Until next month – wishing you financial success!

*Robin*



# ALL THINGS WOMEN



## A STELLAR PREVIEW



*Hello to all my beautiful amazing ladies, my name is K.Y. Smith and I am the founder of Keep It Movin (K.I.M.), Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on empowering, motivating and educating previously and post-release incarcerated women while preventing recidivism. I am also a Certified Empowerment Coach/ Philanthropist, Motivation Speaker and a Breast Cancer Warrior. My passion has always been focused on helping women overcome life's obstacles, understand their identity, and tap into their true power by removing the negative thoughts of a confined mindset.*

*A Virginia native, I also lent my leadership skills while educating and empowering incarcerated women at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center in Fairfax, VA and the Prince William Adult Detention Center in Manassas, VA. I hold a Master of Science in Human Resources Management and a Bachelor Degree in Business Management. Additionally, I am a Certified Reentry Employment Specialist (RES) trained to recognize the national trend toward modeling language that encourages respectful and supportive interactions in working with correctional clients.*

*Hello to all my beautiful amazing ladies! Learning to put ourselves first may sound a little selfish and cliché, but if we never stop to smell the roses, how will you be able to appreciate the awe that they bring us when they are gifted to us?*

*When you are alone, do you ever take the time to bond with yourself as if you are that newborn baby bonding with your mother? This is the kind of self-love that we should have for ourselves and walk in it every day. If we are not taking care of ourselves first, then how can we nurture others? How many of you have flown on a plane and listened to the safety briefing? The flight attendant emphasizes that you should put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others. That is because if you don't take care of yourself first, then how will you be of assistance to others? I always questioned that concept. Because those of us with small children know it is in our nature (natural instinct) to protect them first before we even think of ourselves.*

*Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have become so focused on life in general and just stay afloat that we have neglected our needs. Relax, exhale, and spend some "me" time to focus on the things that make us feel good no matter our circumstance. For my beautiful women who are incarcerated, there is no judgment here. You too can find ways to pamper and love yourself first. I have said this before and I will say it again, "incarceration is just a mindset that keeps us stuck in a place of uncertainty!" The real test is owning your setbacks and creating a plan that will get you "unstuck" from a specific situation. There is always room for change, room to grow, and room to choose "YOU" first. Remember this, you have a built-in beauty, and you possess all the key ingredients to love yourself unapologetically. So sis, what's it going to be? I choose "ME!" There is no bargaining, I choose "ME," and my happiness, I choose "ME!" What makes you choose "YOU?" I would love to hear your amazing story.*

*Next month we will be discussing "Dealing with insecurities and stepping out of your shadow." Ladies, if you have a topic that you would like for me to discuss, I would love to hear your thoughts and comments. Until next time, "let no one who doesn't know your worth decrease your value."*



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## **SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN ROADBUILDING TRAINING PROGRAM NOW OFFERED IN MARCH & MAY OF 2022**

This Roadbuilding Construction Training Class provides a hands-on experience to learners interested in beginning a career in the construction trades.\* This is a Nationally Accredited training program recognized across the country and will definitely make you stand out! Course work includes:

- OSHA Certification
- First Aid/CPR
- Flaggers Training
- Construction Mathematics
- Tool & Material Identification
- Basic Blueprint Reading
- Aerial/Boom Lift
- CDL Preparation
- Hands-On Projects
- Employability Skills

Each class series will be held Monday – Friday from 8 AM to 12 PM for 7 weeks.

For consideration of our upcoming training classes in March and May of 2022:

- Complete registration by March 8 for the March class series.
- Complete registration by May 3 for the May class series.

Register online by using the QR codes to the right or via phone at 262-619-6960. Class start dates will be determined based on interest and enrollment.



Registration for  
March Class



Registration for  
May Class

*\*This program is funded in part by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and is available at no cost for eligible candidates. The employers recruiting for this opportunity are all equal opportunity employers. Successful completion of this program increases your opportunity for a career in the skilled trades.*

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opportunities

# A LOOK AT A FLAGGERS JOB

*Adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*



## What does a Flagger/Traffic Controller do?

A flagger is someone who directs traffic around obstacles in the road. Flaggers keep drivers and pedestrians safe by alerting them to construction. A flagger keeps construction workers safe by alerting drivers of road work. Flaggers will work primarily in road construction. They may work in other construction positions such as emergency response to traffic incidents. Flaggers work with construction workers but they may also work with emergency response teams.

Flaggers are typically employed by government agencies, or construction companies to control the flow of traffic around road construction sites. They erect warning and detour signs, position traffic cones and barricades, and inform the construction crew of any safety hazards.

## Working as a Flagger/Traffic Controller

- Controlling traffic with signs to keep construction crews safe during road construction.
- Putting out traffic cones, blocks, or other road barriers to guide traffic in the road.
- Working in extreme temperatures or late nights to guide traffic.
- Noting license plates to report to the police if drivers disobey any signs or flagger directions.
- Supporting emergency personnel such as police and medics in crisis situations.
- Monitor traffic flow to locate safe gaps through which pedestrians can cross streets.

- Direct traffic movement or warn of hazards, using signs, flags, lanterns, and hand signals.
- Guide or control vehicular or pedestrian traffic at such places as street and railroad crossings and construction sites.
- Job requires maintaining composure, keeping emotions in check, controlling anger, and avoiding aggressive behavior, even in very difficult situations.
- Job requires being pleasant with others on the job and displaying a good-natured, cooperative attitude.
- Inform drivers of detour routes through construction sites.
- Distribute traffic control signs and markers at designated points.
- Stop speeding vehicles to warn drivers of traffic laws.
- Learn the location and purpose of street traffic signs within assigned patrol areas.
- Discuss traffic routing plans and control-point locations with superiors.

## Flagger Responsibilities:

- Using hand signals and direction signs to direct traffic around road construction sites.
- Communicating with other flaggers using hand-held radios to direct two-way traffic onto a single lane.
- Informing the construction crew of any traffic issues that may affect their safety.
- Appropriately positioning warning and detour signs around construction sites.



- Setting up barricades and traffic cones along construction sites to cordon off certain areas.
- Removing all signs, barricades, and traffic cones upon completion of construction work.
- Assisting the construction crew in the removal of rubble, debris, and hazardous materials.
- Recording the license plate numbers of motorists who neglect to obey traffic signs and directions.

- The ability to work in harsh weather conditions.
- Excellent organizational and problem-solving skills.
- Exceptional observation skills.
- Effective communication skills.

### How to become a Flagger

- Choose a certification program. The American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA) has a list of state requirements that vary by state.
- Go through flagger certification training.
- Go through flagger certification training. The ATSSA has an online and classroom training for certification. Students will learn about standard flagger control, proper flagging signals procedures and standard flagger practices.
- Pass the flagger certification examination and get an ATSSA Flagger Certification card.

### Flagger Requirements:

- High school diploma or GED.
- Certification through the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA).
- Proven experience working as a flagger.
- Sound knowledge of state traffic regulations.
- The ability to stand for extended periods.
- The ability to work as part of a team.

### National estimates for Crossing Guards and Flaggers:

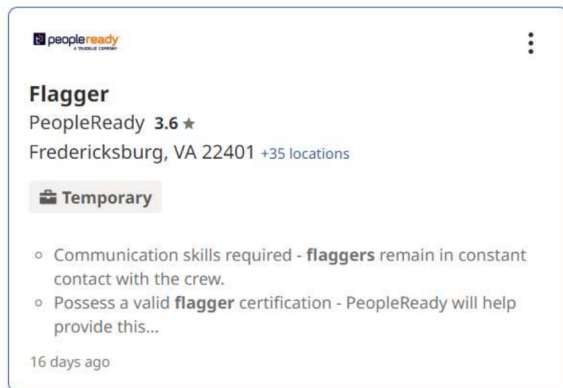
Employment estimate and mean wage estimates for Crossing Guards and Flaggers:

Employment (1)	Employment RSE (3)	Mean hourly wage	Mean annual wage (2)	Wage RSE (3)
82,690	2.9 %	\$ 17.15	\$ 35,670	1.0 %

Percentile wage estimates for Crossing Guards and Flaggers:

Percentile	10%	25%	50% (Median)	75%	90%
Hourly Wage	\$ 11.53	\$ 13.78	\$ 15.12	\$ 18.83	\$ 23.91
Annual Wage (2)	\$ 23,990	\$ 28,660	\$ 31,450	\$ 39,160	\$ 49,720





## Full Job Description

Have you ever been driving and passed by a worker holding a flag for a traffic or construction site? Many drivers and commuters are likely to have seen Flaggers at their jobsites. These are the personnel who control vehicle traffic to build a safe environment for construction/repair projects, such as those involving roadways or parking lots. As a Flagger, you would help notify drivers of the need for reduced speeds or restricted lane flow. As such, you'd play a key role in crafting and maintaining safe construction sites. PeopleReady is now hiring a Flagger who can bring a positive and dedicated attitude to the jobsite. If this sounds like you, we would love for you to apply above.

### Responsibilities Include:

- Working with construction team to establish safe movement of traffic around construction zone, in accordance with safety regulations
- Flagging motorists to warn them of obstacles or repair work ahead
- Taking ownership of keeping work zone and passing cars safe
- May need to place signs, barricades, traffic cones, and other warning devices- duties will vary according to job assignment
- Directing traffic flow using Department of Transportation regulations
- Responding to emergencies as directed and performing tasks in the interest of public safety and property protection during emergencies

### Qualifications:

- Able to work outdoors in all weather conditions
- Communication skills required - flaggers remain in constant contact with the crew
- Able to remain in a stationary position for long periods at a time
- Possess a valid flagger certification - PeopleReady will help provide this training.

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  - PIT Certification (*valid for 3 years*)
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  - Must provide valid driver's license/ID
  - Must complete background check and drug screening (*included in program*)
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For more information,  
visit [www.aspiretolearn.org](http://www.aspiretolearn.org)

### COVID-19 Update:

Social Distancing guidelines enforced  
Surfaces are sanitized regularly  
Face masks and hand sanitizer provided daily  
Daily temperature monitoring







A Great Place To **Start™**

A Member of the Alabama Community College System

~~Tuition \$3,840~~  
**Scholarships  
now Available**

**Apply Now at [www.bishop.edu](http://www.bishop.edu) under  
Programs / Workforce Development  
\*Deadline to Apply: Dec. 17, 2021\***

## Heavy Highway Construction Training Earn and Learn Apprenticeship

Earn while you learn with on-the-job mentors & learn from industry/  
trade instructors during this 6-month training program.

### Credentials Include:

- ♦ ATSSA Flagger
- ♦ Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA 10)
- ♦ National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) Core
- ♦ NCCER Heavy Highway Construction (Level 1)
- ♦ NCCER Heavy Equipment Operator (Level 1)



### Requirements:

- ⇒ Minimum age of 18
- ⇒ TABE Test 5.0 Grade Level or ACT score of 18 within last 3 years
- ⇒ Drug Screen

### **Workforce Development**



In collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration, the Alabama Department of Transportation has entered into an agreement with Bishop State Community College, a member of the Alabama Community College System, to increase the number of workers including minorities, women and disadvantaged individuals who are trained in skills that prepare them for a career in the highway construction trades.



# **FORKLIFT CERTIFICATION COURSE**

**16 Hour Course - NO COST**

**Weekend Course Dates:**

- December 4th & 5th, 2021
- March 5th & 6th, 2022
- May 7th & 8th, 2022

**Classes are from 8am to 4pm**

**Email Tim to sign up!**

**[timothy.smith@workforwarriors.org](mailto:timothy.smith@workforwarriors.org)**

**Location: Crossroads Charter Academy  
418 W. 8th Street Hanford, CA 93230**

Returning Citizens Magazine

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