



AT THE CROSSROADS

Fall 2015: Reentry from Incarceration

Reentry is a minefield with no map. It's a perilous path to walk, because any misstep can have devastating consequences. This newsletter focuses on what happens when people leave incarceration, and if the topic feels a bit bleak, that's because it often is. The struggle to avoid going back to jail or prison begins well before someone gets released, and it lasts for years. The fight to rebuild can be won, but it requires overcoming a system that creates hardship and obstacles instead of opportunities.

Trying to Navigate the Criminal Justice System

"Having a record doesn't change how I view myself because I know who I am, and I know my worth, and I know my capabilities, and what I would like to do. Do I think that some people have a certain view? Of course. But I can't live my life based on what they think. All I can do is my best, that's all I can do. And as long as I know I'm doing that, that's all that matters to me." -Arnisha, ATC client for 10 years



People of color and poor communities are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. For ATC's clients, almost all of whom fit in these categories, being homeless only increases the likelihood that they will end up incarcerated – roughly 99% of our youth have been arrested at some point in their lives, and many of them know what it's like to spend time behind bars.

The cycle is self-perpetuating. After getting released, people reentering society face enormous obstacles that make it extremely difficult to build healthy lives. Homelessness is a big problem, especially in expensive cities like San Francisco. Having a criminal record can prevent people from renting an apartment, can make it even harder (if not impossible) to access housing programs, and can lead those who were homeless

before incarceration to return to the streets when they get out. Realistic employment options are scarce, and ones that pay a living wage are often beyond reach. For those on probation or parole, the smallest misstep can land them back in jail. Plus, the stigma that comes with incarceration can have a demoralizing effect on the way that people view themselves and their futures.

Coping with incarceration

ATC met Arnisha on the streets of the Mission over 10 years ago. She works closely with our counselors, and calls ATC her "second family." Arnisha is resourceful, and skilled at finding new services that can help her. She's also got a great sense of humor and always knows how to make us laugh. Arnisha speaks openly and articulately about her experiences with incarceration, and is focused on building a new life and putting those experiences behind her.

"I've been to prison. I've been to jail," Arnisha explains. "I was 16 when I caught my first juvenile case. I went to juvenile about four times, and the adult criminal justice system I've been in numerous times. I'm so out of count because I've been there so many times, from things like probation violations to drug charges to missing court to traffic tickets. I'm 29, and I've spent the majority of my life behind walls."

Arnisha doesn't want to be in and out of jail, but she tries to find the silver lining, using her

time inside to reflect. "I try to figure out what happened, why it happened, how I can prevent it from happening again ... it's important for me to understand why I go through the things I go through, so I spend a lot of time trying to work on myself and do soul searching," she says. "Every time I go to jail I get a little more clarity, I find a little more growth, and I learn a little bit more about who I am and what it is that I truly want out of life."

It's unfortunate, but for homeless youth living in survival mode, going to jail can sometimes provide respite from the stress of the streets. The stability of a roof over their heads and three meals a day gives people the time and the mental space to slow down and reflect. But let's be clear: the fact that for some, life behind bars is their best option for stability is absolutely unacceptable. Imagine the growth and the change that could occur for these individuals if they were in a supportive housing or drug treatment program that nurtured their spirits, rather than jails and prisons that can add to their trauma and crush them emotionally.

Ron is another ATC client who has been incarcerated several times. "The majority of my twenties I spent locked up in jail, and that's ridiculous. I could have been doing so much." For a while, getting locked up didn't feel like that big of a deal, and didn't change his choices.

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Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin

Nine years ago, I was at our office and our doorbell rang. A client named James was at the door; I hadn't seen him in two years. He'd been in jail in Solano County for the last 22 months, and had just gotten released and put on a bus back to San Francisco. He stood before me in orange flip-flops, the ones you're given when you are locked up. They were the only footwear he owned. He had his award-winning, gentle grin on his face. His eyes filled with tears almost immediately.

He gave me a hug, and tears flowed. He sat down, and I got him a Capri Sun and a box of tissues. He tried to speak, but got choked up each time. Things continued this way for a few minutes, until he finally got his first word out. "Freedom." He shook his head, then got out two more words. "I'm scared." The smile left his face.

I'd known James for five years before he got locked up, and I was a huge fan of his. When I'd see him on outreach, he would incorporate silly freestyles into our conversation, innocently poking fun at me with his rhymes. When we met, he would eat slowly, savoring the food in front of him and appreciating each bite. It often took patience and effort to encourage him to check in. He wasn't used to talking about his life; it didn't come naturally. But when he did, he was thoughtful, honest, and always held hope.

When he got locked up for his most recent stretch, he was 23. He had a full-time job, a two-year-old son, and another child on the way. He was trying to save up enough money to move out of the residential hotel that he and his girlfriend were in, and find a safe apartment where they could raise their children. He got locked up on a probation violation for having drugs on him. Without him, his girlfriend and son became homeless.

We kept in touch during those 22 months, mostly through letters. He started out with a lot of hope, writing about the father he wanted to be, and his ambition to become a filmmaker. As the months went on, I could feel him hardening. He became less expressive in his words. His writing became terse, not very reflective, and decidedly less optimistic. I think he had to wall himself off emotionally in order to mentally tolerate being locked up. He was once of the most creative, free spirits I'd ever met. It must have been soul-crushing.

Back in our office, once the tears stopped, he discussed his fears. That he would get locked up again within a few days. That he wouldn't be there for his son and new daughter, whom he had met for the first time earlier that day. That no one would want to hire him, not even his previous employer, who thought that he had just disappeared. That his family would be disappointed. That he couldn't keep picking himself up. This was the fourth time he had been locked up since the age of 18, and he started to feel a sense of inevitability around going back to jail. Even as he talked about being scared, he was reserved. His walls came back up.

James would get locked up three more times by age 30. He kept trying to rebuild his life, motivated by his two children and his desire for freedom. He found low-paying jobs, but they weren't enough to consistently pay rent, so his housing remained unstable. His sweetness abated, replaced with a harder edge. It proved exhausting to try to wash off the stain of incarceration, as he found it was colored with nearly indelible ink.

Some of our clients manage to overcome the obstacles and break the cycle, including one person interviewed for this newsletter. They are heroic and exceptional. Others spend a lifetime trying to get out of the revolving door. For them, there is no happy ending; there is only the struggle. We help all of them try to move forward, and no matter what, we are there to bear witness.

Electronic copies of previous newsletters are available to view at www.atthecrossroads.org/newsletters

Mission Statement

At The Crossroads reaches out to homeless youth and young adults at their point of need, and works with them to build healthy and fulfilling lives.

Our Core Values

- ❖ Prioritizing meeting the needs of our clients first
- ❖ Making services as accessible as possible
- ❖ Supporting empowerment
- ❖ Respecting individuality

What We Do: The Basics

- ❖ **ATC walks the streets three nights a week** in two neighborhoods of San Francisco: Downtown/Tenderloin and the Mission. We hand out basic necessities like food, socks, and hygiene supplies, and slowly build counseling relationships with youth.
 - ❖ **We focus on youth who have fallen through the cracks of other services**, and would not get support without us.
 - ❖ **We meet with clients 1-to-1.** We listen to them talk about anything they want, with no agenda and no judgment. We help them identify goals, figure out who they want to be, and how to become that person.
 - ❖ **We keep working with clients after they leave the streets.** We continue to support them for as long as they want, helping them build outstanding lives, not just lives of subsistence.
 - ❖ **We partner with other organizations**, connecting our clients with resources such as jobs, housing, education, health care, and mental health services.
 - ❖ **We support other programs** in their efforts to work with homeless youth through dialogue, trainings, and technical assistance.
 - ❖ **We work with the government at the city and state levels** to improve the continuum of support for all disconnected young people.
- "If you're helpless, homeless, and fearful of what's next, ATC is a place where you can go to get just a little bit of clarity. A little bit of hope."*
- Bubbles, ATC client*

Get Involved with At The Crossroads

Make a donation to ATC

You'll experience a sense of happiness and fulfillment that you've never known. You'll want to do it again and again! In all seriousness, the future of At The Crossroads depends on the generosity of individuals who believe in our work. If you value what we do, please support us! **Make a credit card donation at www.atthecrossroads.org, or make checks payable to "At The Crossroads."**

Join our email list

Sign up to receive emails twice a month about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and ways to get involved. **Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org with the subject heading "Join the ATC email list."**

Volunteer

Do you have free time in the morning or afternoon? Come by our office to sort clothing, put away food, prepare supplies, help with administrative needs, or pitch in on a number of tasks that help keep us going. **If you are interested in learning more, please email volunteer@atthecrossroads.org.**

Get your company involved

When companies and their employees engage in our work, it can have a huge impact. The opportunities are endless: team participation in our fundraising hike, grants, sponsorship of events, group volunteering, in-kind donations, individual and matching donations, or pro bono services. **To get your company involved, email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**



Sophie, Candy, and Chris are some of our awesome weekly volunteers!

Help with new clothing donations

ATC recently lost our biggest clothing donor, so we are in desperate need of stores and businesses to donate new clothing. In particular, we are looking for jeans, hoodies, t-shirts, and warm items. **If you can help connect us with a store or clothing manufacturer who may be able to donate these items, please email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

Watch and share our documentary

Monica Lam's 15-minute documentary takes you onto the streets and into the world of our clients and our work. **You can find the documentary at www.atthecrossroads.org.** After you watch, share it with your community as a great way to introduce new people to ATC!

Share our newsletter

Please spread the word about ATC to people you know who might be interested in our work! If you want to send anyone our newsletter, give us their name and address and we will mail them a copy. **Email getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org.**

Supporting Youth When the Odds Are Against Them



Irina Alexander, ATC Counselor for 3 years *Joey Hess, ATC Counselor for 4 years*

Working with youth on the streets can mean watching people get trapped in a cycle of homelessness, leading to incarceration, leading back to homelessness, and so on. This cycle diminishes their sense of opportunity: instead of finding doors that open up new possibilities, they encounter brick walls. Rather than pathways to success, they see roadblocks ahead. Simply put, the system is set up in a way that makes it exceptionally hard for people leaving incarceration to rebuild their lives. This doesn't mean, however, that our youth can't beat the odds, or that ATC can't support them in overcoming the obstacles and accomplishing their goals.

Working inside jails and prisons

The process of helping our youth rebuild their lives after they get released often begins when they are still inside. Every week, we schedule a day to visit our clients in jail or prison. "I've had some pretty regular meetings in jail, where we talk about day-to-day stuff," explains ATC Counselor Anna Fai, "but also other meetings where it has been confessional, regretful, or quite emotional. It has been all over the spectrum." For many clients, visits from ATC are the only ones they get. Getting locked up means that they suddenly have the time to take a step back and think, so our conversations become a powerful outlet for them to reflect. "Some of my deepest counseling sessions have happened in jail," says ATC Counselor Irina Alexander. "It's a small positive to a really negative situation."

During our visits, as well as through letters and phone calls, we check in with our clients about preparing for their release. "Once they are closer to getting out, they are definitely talking about what their plans are. Getting a job, getting housing, or rebuilding relationships they had in the past," ATC Counselor Joey Hess explains. "We can help them sort through their immediate plans versus their longer-term plans, and create realistic steps." ATC tries to help our youth think

"Honestly, I think the system is structured to make our clients fail. It is virtually impossible for them to achieve their goals. They might try as hard as they possibly can, but roadblocks almost always come up."

-Irina Alexander, ATC Counselor

"Our clients don't get many chances once they are outside of jail or prison. They don't get the chance to mess up. If they make a mistake, they get sent back to square one, which can feel so challenging for people who are trying to rebuild their lives."

-Joey Hess, ATC Counselor

about their goals, providing a stable source of support throughout their transition. "For some people, making plans for when they get out becomes a major project while they are in," adds Irina. "It's something to look forward to."

Navigating the limited resources

When our youth are released, they don't receive much information or support from the criminal justice system, and the sudden change can be overwhelming. "They don't even know who their parole officer is going to be when they get out," Joey explains. "For one of my clients, it was just like, here is \$200 and a bus ticket. The transition was so abrupt, especially since he had been inside for such a long time. How are you supposed to know what the next steps are?"

ATC's clients will sometimes show up at our office within hours after getting out. They want to say hello, get a hug, see a friendly face, and start getting help. "What comes up first is to help them with basic needs," says Anna. "Food, clothing, shelter, stuff like that. But those are only short-term solutions, and are only going to hold them over for a little while. The longer-term help is harder – making the connections to resources, having them go there, and guiding them through the process. Sometimes I don't even know where to start." Furthermore, many resources designated for people who were formerly incarcerated are only accessible through probation or parole officers. ATC tries to find as many options for services as we can, but some are simply beyond our reach.

Joey adds that options for help can have serious downsides. "A lot of services that are available are right around the corner from drugs and violence. Some of the programs are right across the street from one of the most violent corners in the city. It's just not a recipe for success – people are constantly re-introduced to the environments that got them locked up in the first place. They're being told that they have to navigate the neighborhood where they may have been on the streets for years, just to get to the services that are supposed to help them."

A system full of obstacles

There are so many obstacles that await people who are leaving jail or prison that it would be impossible to list them all. The overarching theme, however, is that people who have been incarcerated already had their chance – and they chose to break the law. It feeds into the idea that these people deserve to have certain rights and freedoms taken away. It also conditions society to view them as dangerous or no-good, and to treat them like second-class citizens. The result of all this is a

Reflections from the Inside: Barbie Prepares for Her Release



Barbie has been working with ATC for over 15 years. She writes to us from San Francisco County Jail.

"I have been locked up for 2,372 days, which is 6 years, 5 months, and 10 days. I go home during the holiday season in December, thanks be to God. 2015 is my year, a new life, a new dawn, and

a new day for me." ATC has been supporting Barbie for her entire time in jail. She has shown incredible fortitude and perspective during her incarceration, and is currently focusing all of her positive energy on preparing for her upcoming release this year.

"My first day out, I want to go to the nail shop and do the girly thing and get all dolled up with my mom and sister. Feel like a brand new woman. I say this because being in jail you have the minimum, nothing extra or over the top. So to be able to get my nails done is really huge for me," Barbie explains. "I also want to go to my favorite taqueria and get a super steak and prawn burrito with all the works, extra extra!"

"The second day," she continues, "is for official business. Meeting my parole officer, getting my license renewed, and opening a bank account." Barbie isn't looking forward to being on parole, but she's determined not to let it hold her back. "I'm not too

worried about it because I plan to head straight to the top on a positive tip. I pray I get a PO who is helpful, understanding, and compassionate. Those qualities are really important to me. I plan to be the best parolee, because coming back to jail is not an option for me. This place will forever be in my rearview."

Aside from parole, Barbie knows that she will face other challenges. She has applied to several housing agencies, but hasn't yet secured a stable place to live. She'll stay with family when she gets out, but needs to find a permanent solution. Her record will make her ineligible for many housing options, but she's hopeful that with her legal team's support, she can work on getting her record expunged.

"The day I am released from this facility, I will always put my best foot forward. I will not let my past get in the way of my future," she declares. "I will pile so much good on the bad that the past will not even matter anymore."

"My plans have been with me since the beginning of time. I never gave up hope. I have a cute journal book filled with tons of goals and things I want to accomplish. I am so anxious to get my plan in motion." Barbie writes about being excited to enroll in school, see all of the changes to the city, and start creating a new life. Her enthusiasm bubbles off the page as she uses words like "victorious" and "triumphant" to describe how she feels about the future. "I have all of the good feelings," she says. "I am ready to embrace the unknown, one day at a time."

system that pushes people down, rather than giving them a hand up. A system that emphasizes punishment over rehabilitation. A system that makes it extraordinarily hard for people to succeed, yet places the blame squarely on them when they falter.

"You're under a microscope. Any minor infraction while you're on probation or parole can put you back inside – so if you jaywalk, you could go back to jail," explains Joey. "Our clients don't get many chances once they are outside of jail or prison. They don't get the chance to mess up. If they make a mistake, they get sent back to square one, which can feel so challenging for people who are trying to rebuild their lives."

Anna recalls one of her clients who was working toward her goals, but lost all progress because of one phone call. "She had a job, was working on finding housing, and was really on steady footing. She'd been on probation for years. One day, someone called the cops on her for a false charge. She was thrown in jail for a few days, so suddenly she doesn't show up for work, she doesn't return calls about housing, and people think she is being irresponsible. Then she had to explain to everyone that she was in jail, which completely threw everything she was working on to the side."

For many of our youth, the cycle of being in and out of jail never seems to end. "Jail just becomes part of their identity," Irina explains. She recently spoke with a client who described his life by saying that he goes to jail, he gets out, he doesn't have a way to meet his needs so he starts using drugs, and then he goes back to jail again. "That's just his process, that's all he has ever experienced living here in San Francisco. He doesn't know any other way."

Hearing stories like that can make us feel nearly powerless. "Honestly, I think the system is structured to make our clients fail," Irina admits. "It is virtually impossible for them to achieve their goals. They might try as hard as they possibly can, but roadblocks almost always come up." In particular, Irina recounts what it was like when she was helping one of her longtime clients apply for housing. "One of the most devastating things that happened to this client is that she was denied housing because of her criminal record, even though she had been on probation for several years and hadn't committed any crime or violated probation. I remember leaving that meeting and feeling the weight of it – once someone is classified as a criminal, it sticks with them and affects their entire life."

Breaking the cycle

Our client who was denied housing because of her record recently got her record cleared through the Clean Slate program. "It was definitely a huge load off of her," says Irina. "It felt like she had a fresh start to everything." Clearing her record doesn't magically solve all of her problems, but it's an important start. Every time our clients take a step forward, they leave certain obstacles in their wake. ATC supports them in taking these steps, both big and small, as they reach for their goals.

The odds are against them, but they continue to fight. Reentry is a lengthy, complicated, and trying process, but we have seen our clients break the cycle of the criminal justice system and build the lives they want. It takes unshakable persistence and drive, near-perfection when it comes to avoiding mistakes, and often a few good breaks – and seeing them climb out of it is inspiring.

"I kept making the same stupid mistakes and going back, going back, going back."

For Ron, everything changed when he went to prison and served 16 months at San Quentin. "Riding that bus through that yard, and you get off that bus, and they tell you to strip and take off everything right there — that's when everything gets real. I'm here. I'm in prison," he recalls. Once that reality set in, Ron knew that he never wanted to come back.

ATC started working with Ron after he was released about five years ago, and we've watched him reach for his goals with extraordinary drive and focus. Even as he struggled with obstacles and setbacks, Ron maintained his positive, persevering attitude. When he talks about his time in prison, you can hear the resolve in his voice.

"I sat there and thought about my kids, my family, my past, my future. I also strategized. I wrote out a game plan for when I got out. First thing I'm going to do is sign up for General Assistance, I'm going to get on food stamps, I'm going to try to link up and figure out how to get some employment," Ron explains. "I got to get out of here and plant seeds so they can sprout. They won't sprout right away but eventually they will grow ... I wrote everything down in a realistic sense, you know, from step one to step two to step three."

The attitudes of Arnisha and Ron are common among our clients. They take a high degree of personal responsibility for their situations, and focus on what they can do differently to break the cycle of incarceration. This helps propel them forward, keeping them from feeling bogged down by the many obstacles that are beyond their control and can get in their way. But it's important to recognize that even when our clients are focused, positive, and persistent, the systemic and institutional challenges they face require them to be nearly perfect in order to avoid future incarceration.

Mike has been an ATC client for 14 years. For most of the time that we have known him, Mike was in prison — he spent 10 years and nine months shuffling between seven different penitentiaries in California. Much of our relationship with Mike was built through phone calls, writing letters, sending books, and occasional visits. He is perceptive, thoughtful, and very appreciative of ATC's support. While locked up, Mike felt very disconnected from everything and everyone he knew. "My backbone was At The Crossroads," he says. "It was my sanity. It was the only thing that kept me going."

Getting out and facing obstacles

Mike was living on the streets before he got locked up, so staying off of the streets when he got out of prison was his biggest goal. For the last 18 months of his sentence, he worked hard to secure stable housing in his hometown of Olympia, WA. He applied for and was accepted into a program called Drexel House, and planned to get his parole transferred up there so that he could move back home. When Mike was released, however, those plans were abruptly put on hold.

Even though he had found a supportive housing placement and had worked with Drexel House to produce the paperwork that his parole officer asked for, Mike's request to transfer was denied. ATC repeatedly tried to advocate for this transfer, but to no avail. The whole process was frustrating and unclear.

"My parole officer never indicated that there wouldn't be a possibility to transfer," he explains. Suddenly, he was back at square one. "I really didn't plan on having to stay in San Francisco for my whole three years of parole, so I didn't make any plans until it was late. Right now, I'm just kind of stuck."

Mike with ATC Program Manager Shawn Garety at his first ATC holiday party after getting released from prison.



"It sucks, because I got out of prison to, in a way, get put back into another one."

-Mike, ATC client for 14 years

Instead of moving to Olympia, Mike was sent to a mandatory drug program, which almost felt like he never left incarceration. "I got out of prison to, in a way, get put back into another one. When you get into that program, there's a blackout period, and you can't leave the place for two weeks. One of the biggest things I noticed and that struck

me as disappointing is that I thought I was done using my CDC number, which is the number issued to you when you get locked up. At the check-in process at that program, anytime you go in or out, you have to give them your CDC number. So that sucked."

Mike stayed in the program for nearly a year, but is currently on the streets with his partner. He would like to find a different housing program, but there aren't options that will allow them to live together. "I probably would be in a program now, but since I'm in a relationship and she's on the streets as well, it's difficult. I don't want to leave her out here. A lot of the programs are very strict, like you can only get weekend passes, or three hours a day, or something like that. And I'm not comfortable with just seeing the person I love for three hours a day."

Like Mike, Ron also struggled with parole after he got out, knowing that any mistake could cost him his freedom. "It's hard to walk a straight line, because there are so many obstacles directly hitting you the moment you get out," he explains. "You get influenced by old people you used to hang with, old situations, old places, and it's based on a lifestyle that you're used to." Potential parole violations were all around him, but Ron focused on doing everything in his power to avoid these pitfalls. He also hated the way that being on parole made him feel. "It sucked to be controlled like that, because even though you're free, you're still attached to a chain."

Another major challenge was housing. Ron was able to stay with friends and family for a while, but ultimately ended up with no place to live. "I was pretty much homeless, but I'm not the type that would be lonely or down," he says. "So I went and bought me a van, it was like a convertible camper ... I was surviving like that for about a whole year."

Trying to get a job was one of Ron's biggest goals — and one of his biggest obstacles. "I was a black man on parole, you know? Nobody wanted to give me no chance," he explains. "I always felt like, now I've got a record, I'm hindered. Nobody will want to hire me." Ron sometimes felt defeated, and would imagine his job applications going straight into the "no" pile. "Of course that dropped my self-esteem." But he refused to give up. Ron connected with employment programs, including the Northern California Service League and Toolworks, to get job training, work on his interviewing skills, and build his resume.

Arnisha has been caught up in the cycle of incarceration and probation for years. "I feel like the system is always set up for you to fail,"

"I believe I can reduce the recidivism rate through my work ethic and desire, granted they give me the opportunity to do so. All these obstacles and everything that's hindering me, that's what made me thirsty to want to go forward and do it. Not just to show off or show nobody else – do it for myself. Prove to myself that I can get this done."

-Ron, ATC client for 5 years



she explains. "They put you on probation because they want you to come back to jail – and they believe you will. That's why you have such an extended stay as a person who has the ability to be searched and seized, to be stopped at any point, to get arrested for being in the wrong area if the area is considered drug-related or high-crime. I think that probation is definitely designed for you to fail."

In addition to the constant scrutiny, probation imposes another burden on Arnisha: she owes the city about \$4,000. "When a person gets on probation, you've got to pay a court fee, a tracking fee, a daily fee, all these different fees. It adds up, and that's how people end up owing so much restitution to probation." Arnisha doesn't have the money to cover these fees, so she accrues penalties, and the amount she owes keeps getting larger and larger. "I'll have to pay these people for a long time." She says it's almost like her version of college tuition.

Even though she's been struggling against immense systemic barriers, Arnisha focuses on the things that she can control. For a long time, she says she felt "selfish" and "stuck," but now, she's ready to move forward.

"This last time for me, walking out the door, I left out into the sunlight and I was grateful. I was grateful and I was thankful that my jail time wasn't bad, that my courtroom didn't give up on me, that I had another chance to do what I truly wanted to do inside, and that's to complete something – to start something and finish something. I was excited about going to [a drug] program, it's something that I wanted and committed myself to doing," Arnisha reflects. "I was just excited about having this new chance and starting over again. I didn't have that fear that I had when I was in custody ... I felt prepared to take on these new challenges, and I believed in myself."

Finding ways to follow through

Arnisha has gotten support from services both inside and outside of jail. She's currently working with the Behavioral Health Court, a special court system that provides wraparound services and treatment for clients who have been diagnosed with mental health and drug issues. Right now, she has housing through a drug program at HealthRight 360. "It's been a goal of mine for a long time to complete the program and complete court. Program is six months, court is a year, and I haven't been able to do that in the last two years."

Despite past setbacks, Arnisha is optimistic that this time she'll succeed. "I know I'm gonna finish, because I'm doing well and I'm strong today. I'm stronger than I was the last time, and I have just a different outlook." Beyond completing program, two of her biggest goals are finding housing and saving money. "Housing is a bit difficult, it can be really frustrating," she says. "I've done so many applications." Working on her finances has been hard, too. Arnisha can't save money without a job, and trying to get a job is really hard when you have a record and gaps in your resume.

Arnisha is determined to overcome these obstacles. "It doesn't change how I view myself because I know who I am, and I know my worth, and I know my capabilities, and what I would like to do," she declares. "All I can do is my best, that's all I can do. And as long as I know I'm doing that, that's all that matters to me."

For Mike, moving home to Olympia is still his long-term goal. He continues to work with Drexel House to keep his spot on their list, and he intends to follow through on those plans when he finishes parole next year.

Ron has stayed motivated in the face of near-constant obstacles, and checks off his goals

one by one. "It was rough sticking to my plan when I got out," he remembers. "Seeing everybody riding in their cars ... money in their pocket. I wasn't jealous or envious, but I was inspired by that. Give me a little time and I'm going to be doing the same thing. Might not be tomorrow, might not be next week, but it's going to happen. Just got to be patient, diligent, stick to my script."

Ron was released on a Friday. The following Monday, he started on the steps he wrote out for himself while in prison. Sometimes it was discouraging because he had to wait, come back, or fill out more forms, but he accomplished it all. "You got to go through the process. I did that, and I went to the social security office, the GA office, DMV, and everywhere else I needed to go to get these things handled. By the next week, I had it."

Within two years, Ron got off parole early due to his good behavior and strong work ethic. After living in a van, he managed to secure stable housing. All the effort he put in around employment finally paid off when he got a good job as a custodian. As he describes getting hired, he says, "I walked out the door feeling hella accomplished ... that right there touched my heart. I'm like, I did it."

Since then, Ron has already been promoted. "It feels really good, and makes me think, I came this far, now I want to get further." He's setting new goals, learning about financial management from his coworkers, and stepping into a new world full of possibility. Ron is excited to move forward, but he also respects where he came from. "I didn't want to go through these things in my life. I didn't want to experience being poor and growing up institutionalized, but at the same time, I wouldn't take nothing back. Everything I've been through has taught me a significant lesson that I'll never forget."

Organizations Working to Change the Landscape of Reentry: Five Keys Charter Schools and Root & Rebound



Steve Good, Executive Director

Five Keys and ATC have partnered for the past two years, working collaboratively to support our mutual clients who are incarcerated. Through Five Keys, our counselors are able to meet individually with our clients inside, and help them prepare for their release.

Can you explain the mission and the work of Five Keys?

The mission of Five Keys has evolved over the years. When we were founded in 2003 by the San Francisco Sheriff's Department, our mission was to educate those who are incarcerated, and in doing so, reduce recidivism and provide a service to the citizens of San Francisco. Today, we're more focused on serving disenfranchised populations both inside and outside of incarceration, and restoring communities by re-engaging individuals in the education process.

How has your organization changed and grown over the years?

We started as a small charter school with 175 students inside the San Francisco County Jail. Today we have about 3,000 daily students, and about 1,000 of them are in San Francisco. We're operating in four counties: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Solano, and Alameda. We originally started with charter schools, but now we do so much more. We run programs on substance abuse, violence prevention, meditation, and restorative justice. We put on an art show every year, highlighting the work of our students and clients. We also do reentry programming and intensive case management.

For example, in Los Angeles, we have 90 students in a pilot project. We have case managers working in concert with the Sheriff's Department and Adult Probation to provide intensive, wraparound services while they are in custody. We're identifying what their needs are, and implementing tailor-made programs to address those individual needs. They are getting high school and college classes, plus vocational training. When they're preparing for release, we have a transitional release plan in place so that they have housing, a social security card, and a state ID. Then, they have ongoing care and support outside. We're doing a lot, but it's still not enough – we need programs like this on a massive scale.

Where has Five Keys had the biggest impact on the lives of people in reentry?

The fact that our focus is education has had a great impact. 100% of our students are high school dropouts. Because the average age of our students is 26 years old, which is considerably higher than your typical student, the majority never envisioned themselves completing their high school diploma. The average literacy level of a person who comes to us is between the 5th and 6th grade levels. We also have

students who are illiterate, and there's so much shame that comes with that. It's a major barrier. Assisting somebody in obtaining a high school diploma, or getting a food handler certificate, or developing job skills, or learning to use a computer is extremely important – but I would say equally as important is taking those individuals who can barely read and bringing them to the point where they can read and comprehend. It allows them to function in society, and it's just huge.

What are advantages or challenges around reentry that are unique to SF?

San Francisco is an interesting mix. There are some great programs, and a network of nonprofits that are dedicated to reentry services. The barriers, however – the cost of living is insane. Who can afford this housing? Afford the high cost of groceries, eating out, and even gas? On top of that, the jobs that our clients who are getting out are eligible for usually don't pay enough. What are they supposed to do for a living? We definitely see folks struggle to meet their goals. Our typical student is a parent, comes from a bad neighborhood, and has had trauma in his or her life. So getting released and then managing medical problems, trauma, poverty, being a parent, being unemployed, and trying to go back to school – that's a lot to ask. That's a tall order.

What do you think could be done to reform or improve this system?

The criminal justice system is not set up to help people reenter society one bit. The fact that we think taking somebody out of society, putting them in a cage, and providing them no additional supportive services is going to make them a better person and reduce the chances they will reoffend is naive. It's insane. We need to fund programs that will change what incarceration looks like. Rehabilitative programs, vocational training, education. We need that to see significant change.



Katherine Katcher, Founder & Executive Director

ATC is excited to begin collaborating with Root & Rebound. Our staff recently attended one of their trainings on navigating reentry, and we are so appreciative of their comprehensive Roadmap to Reentry guide as a tool for our clients coming out of incarceration.

What inspired you to found this organization?

I attended a restorative justice event that got me really interested in criminal justice issues. I started looking at who ends up incarcerated and for what reason, and at the system that criminalizes people of color and poor people at much higher rates than people who are privileged. For me, it was a question of why there weren't legal services groups working on behalf of people coming out of incarceration, who face many, many legal barriers. It seemed like a gap that needed to be filled.

Can you explain the mission and the work of Root & Rebound?

Our mission is to increase access to justice and opportunity for people in reentry from prison and jail, and to educate and empower those who support them, fundamentally advancing and strengthening the reentry infrastructure across the state of California. The model for our work is flexible, and will likely change over time as the needs of the people we serve shift. But our model right now is based on the manual that we created. It covers the critical areas of law and life for when people get out, including employment, housing, education, public benefits, and more. It documents all these barriers, and also explains how to navigate barriers that seem insurmountable – but most of the time they are not. We also run a hotline every Friday that provides reentry legal information.

How did you create your Roadmap to Reentry guide?

It was myself and one other attorney, plus a wonderful team of volunteers, law students, and interns, who worked for 14 months to create this guide. We started by doing initial focus groups, asking questions of formerly incarcerated people, clients we had worked with, and advocates. We identified nine areas [housing; public benefits; parole and probation; education; understanding and cleaning up your criminal record; ID and voting; family and children; court-ordered debt; and employment] and then did legal research. We spent a huge amount of time deconstructing the legal language and putting it in plain speak, in simple terms that people could understand. Now, we're working on getting this guide to people. I think all of the prison libraries in the state have a copy, and inmates are writing us every day for copies. We're also doing trainings across the state to bring this into communities that are under-resourced.

What has been the impact of the Roadmap to Reentry guide and trainings?

People are really excited to have this at their fingertips. At our trainings, we've had formerly incarcerated people and their family members, social service agencies, case managers, attorneys, as well as people from the Sheriff's Department, probation, and parole. So it's a really wide lens. People who have been doing this kind of work are grateful to finally have all this information in one place. We've also been getting letters from incarcerated people saying that the guide is really helpful.

Do people overcome legal barriers with the right information and support?

Yes, certainly. Big barriers we see are conditions of parole and probation that are overly restrictive and unconstitutional, that can really hamper someone's rehabilitation and stability. We've had great success at getting unconstitutional restrictions lifted. Another big issue is family reunification. Even if the reason for incarceration has nothing to do with family issues, a conviction can cause you to lose a lot of your parental rights. We've had some family law cases that have been very successful. Another big issue is debt – restitution, court-ordered debt, or traffic tickets that have been mounting the entire time you've been inside, so now you owe \$17,000. We've been able to help our clients get their fees removed. I think there's a lot of empowerment that comes from learning what your rights are, and people become more skilled at navigating difficult processes.

How do you see the attitudes and policies around reentry changing?

I think in California and nationally, we're seeing a bit of an awakening that our system is not a fair system. It's not a justice system – it's a complete injustice system. There's an awakening to what's been happening for decades to communities of color and poor communities around policing, prosecution, incarceration, and reentry. We need new policies that promote re-integration and services in the community over the building of jails and harsh sentences. We're witnessing change, and I think that in the next 50 years we'll see a de-incarceration across the state. Hopefully with that will come an investment in services – legal services and legal advocacy, public education, and social services. I really do feel very hopeful about that.

Criminal Justice in San Francisco

San Francisco County Jail

According to a 2015 report published by the SF Controller's Office:

- ♦ Total average daily population: 1,285
- ♦ Younger adults are the most likely age group to be incarcerated: 59% of inmates are between 18-39 years old, whereas only 37-40% of SF residents are 18-39
- ♦ African Americans are incarcerated at a wildly disproportionate rate: 50% of inmates are African American, whereas only 6% of SF residents are African American
- ♦ **85% of the people in jail have not been convicted of a crime**

Homelessness & Criminal Justice

According to the 2015 SF Point-In-Time Homeless Count & Survey:

- ♦ Total sheltered and unsheltered homeless population: 7,539, which is 1-2% of the SF adult population
- ♦ 3% of the homeless population, or 242 people, were in jail at the time of the count
 - ♦ **Taken with the average daily jail population from above, this means that at any given time, roughly 19% of the SF jail population is homeless**
- ♦ 29% of respondents had spent at least one night in jail or prison within the past 12 months; 18% had spent more than 5 nights
- ♦ 17% of respondents were on probation or parole at the time of the survey; 18% were on probation or parole at the time they became homeless

According to a recent survey of 351 homeless people published by the Coalition on Homelessness in their "Punishing the Poorest" report:

- ♦ 59% of respondents had been incarcerated in SF County Jail or CA State Prison during their lifetime, and 44% had experienced multiple incarcerations
- ♦ **34% of those who had been housed at the time of their last incarceration became homeless at the time of their release**
- ♦ Of those who had been incarcerated, only 19% were offered any services upon their most recent release, and the most common services offered were: a pamphlet, a bus ticket, a shelter bed, or access to a housing wait list
- ♦ An estimated 25% of the SF residents on probation are homeless
- ♦ Nationally, 60% of formerly incarcerated people remain unemployed one year after their release

Welcome to ATC's New Staff and Board Members!

Gemma Datuin, Administrative Assistant



Gemma became our Administrative Assistant back in May, and has been hard at work ever since. She does a million things to make sure that our office keeps running smoothly (no small task), and somehow manages to maintain her laid-back, easygoing style. Gemma was born and raised on the tiny island of Guam, and has

dreamed of moving to San Francisco for years. Now that she finally lives in the city, Gemma likes to spend her time going to the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, meeting new people, playing the cajón (a box-shaped drum), and singing in her band. Come by our office sometime to meet Gemma, who will inevitably be hard at work!

Demaree Miller, Outreach Counselor



Demaree joined ATC this July as an Outreach Counselor. For the past five years he has been working with underserved youth and low-income families, and he is excited to have the opportunity to start providing direct services to ATC's clients. Demaree has quickly made a name for himself as our resident comedian and free

thinker. He rarely misses the chance to crack a joke, and has a unique talent for inventing his own brand of "Deep Thoughts" that make us break out in laughter. Born and raised in San Francisco, he also has a passion for creative outlets like writing and making music. Demaree brings the quirk like no other, and we are better for it!



ATC's new Board members from left to right: Mandy Stewart, Rachel Marshall, Jenny Lyell, Sara Linderman, and Nick Bernate. Not pictured: Laurie Bernstein.

Nick Bernate is an Associate Attorney at the law firm of Bledsoe, Diestel, Treppa & Crane, LLC. When he's not working on trial and litigation matters and using his strong analytical skills, he spends time indoor rock climbing and cooking with his wife. Nick is enthusiastic about ATC's philosophy of unconditional support.

Laurie Bernstein is the Director of Workforce Services & Social Enterprise at Community Housing Partnership, a San Francisco nonprofit focused on helping homeless people secure housing and become self-sufficient. Outside of the nonprofit world, Laurie loves the outdoors, and has climbed to the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro!

Sara Linderman is a VP of Strategy at Sterling Brands with over 10 years of research and marketing experience. Sara has been living in San Francisco for eight years, where you can find her running along the Marina or swimming in the Bay. She is excited to be part of an organization that is tackling one of the city's most pressing issues.

Jenny Lyell has worked in the high tech industry for the past decade, and is currently a Corporate Strategy Manager at Adobe Systems. Originally from Texas, Jenny moved to San Francisco two years ago and loves the city. She likes being directly involved in the community, and is also a volunteer mentor for Girls Who Code.

Rachel Marshall is a public defender at the Alameda County Public Defender's Office. Rachel is passionate about criminal justice reform, ending poverty and homelessness, and ending the school-to-prison pipeline. In other words, she fits right in at ATC! In her (rare) free time, she enjoys traveling, reading, and music festivals.

Mandy Stewart is a Vice President/Research Analyst for Franklin Templeton Investments, specializing in the not-for-profit, senior living industry. Mandy loves to stay active by running, skiing, and hiking. She's also been an amazing member of the ATC community for more than a decade as a volunteer, donor, and ambassador!

Announcing New Staff Positions: Senior Youth Advocate and Volunteer Coordinator



Ivan Alomar is stepping into a new role as our **Senior Youth Advocate**. He has over 20 years of experience working with youth, including 10 years at ATC where he started as an Outreach Counselor and then became our Community Resource Coordinator. We are incredibly excited for Ivan to use his considerable skills in a more targeted way to help us better meet the needs of our youth!



April Garcia has become ATC's first-ever **Volunteer Coordinator**! She joined our staff as an Outreach Counselor in April 2013, and always had a passion for working with volunteers. With her friendly nature, knack for organizing, and awesome creative skills, we look forward to seeing how she grows our volunteer program to create an even bigger impact on the lives of our clients!

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To see all of our 2015 Annual Fund donors, go to: www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors

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We wish there were enough space to acknowledge everyone who donated to the I Think I Can Campaign and Summer SunDay Hike! Find more of our awesome supporters at: www.atthecrossroads.org/contributors.

Summer SunDay Hike for Homeless Youth



Summer SunDay 2015 was our most successful hike ever!
Thank you to all of our fantastic hikers, donors, and volunteers:
with your hard work and support, we raised over \$125,000!

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We couldn't have done it without our interns!

We are thrilled to begin partnering with **DukeEngage**, a program that empowers students to address critical human needs through immersive service experiences. This summer, **Hannah Hewitt** (left) and **Madison Thomas** (right) worked incredibly hard to make the event a success. We were so lucky to have these dedicated and enthusiastic individuals on our team, and they did a fantastic job!