



APRIL UPDATE FOR HERE TO HELP

Having just completed the first quarter of 2023 and our having modified Here to Help Foundation on January 1 to only assist returning citizens, it is abundantly clear that was a great decision.

The ever-increasing volume of returning citizens that we are helping and the time-consuming nature of it all, really resonates with us that altering our focus towards this very marginalized group of was the right thing to do.

The success that these individuals, in our Returning Hope to Returning Citizens program, are obtaining is significant and clearly life altering.

Their trajectory of success is wonderful to see, and we are so very proud of all that they have accomplished as of now, and as foreseen in the future, as they continue to achieve.

Please enjoy some of the stories of these individuals who we helped during the month of March:

LEON:

Hard to fathom 25 years in prison for a crime one did not commit!

That's the story of Leon Benson who was just freed from his 60-year sentence for murder as the Prosecutor's office determined that he had clearly been wrongfully convicted.

Leon was a free man as he left prison and simply said: "Truth never dies."

Leon never lost hope, even after 11 years in solitary confinement and multiple denied appeals. He always believed he would get justice.

He's excited for the opportunities that lay ahead for him.

We will be by his side all through that process as we make things easier for him as he adjusts to his new life. We started with providing him with all basic necessities and will move forward with getting Leon his own home, vehicle etc.

We can't replace all that he has lost over the prior 25 years given the emotional ordeal etc. of his wrongful confinement, but we will do the best we can to make his path to success as smooth a ride as we can.



KENNETH:

A promotion at work is especially meaningful for returning citizens as that type of positive feedback is not something they have experienced much of.

We started helping Kenneth last November and provided him a bed and basic necessities as he was lacking everything. Yet he was doing very well working as a line cook at upscale Savannah Blue restaurant in Detroit.

We've continued assisting him and he's now ready and excited to move into his own home today. He was also just promoted to Executive Chef at work and is very proud! Woo-hoo!

Wonderful times indeed and we helped with move in costs, furniture, and home furnishings that he just picked up from us.

The future is bright and exciting for Kenneth!



SHERNARD

Perpetually smiling. That's how everyone describes Shernard as he always has an upbeat attitude.

He just began with the Greening of Detroit program which provides job training within the landscaping sector and including training as a Certified Tree Artisan.

He needed some assistance getting around and he asked us for a bicycle and helmet and a lock. We immediately helped him, and we just delivered the items. Shernard was very excited and, as always, smiling!

Shernard will have full time employment once the training is complete, and the bicycle is going to come in very handy in getting around during this time.

So, if you see a smiling gentleman on a bicycle, give a wave.



ALFREDA and WILLIE:

It's wonderful when we can connect two returning citizens so they can work together for their mutual benefit.

As it is with Alfreda and Willie, both of whom we have been assisting for a while. Alfreda's mom passed away recently, and she inherited her home which needed a tremendous amount of work, including a new roof that we helped her with.

The home needed additional work before Alfreda could move in and we connected her with Willie who just re-launched his home improvement company and who we recently helped with tools and equipment to take on more work.

Now Willie is assisting Alfreda with the needed home repairs. A win, win situation for all!



SARAH:

Felon Friendly is an odd wording but it's accurate to describe companies willing to provide second chances by hiring returning citizens. Not to simply deny their application because of one's criminal record.

Like 7-Eleven who's been very willing to provide employment to many of those we are working with and are just days out of prison.

Including Sarah who was recently hired by 7-Eleven and she's quickly been able to start saving money while she currently living with family members.

She has a long-term goal of getting her Commercial Driver License and we've been helping her in various ways as we will in the future. And thanks to 7-Eleven for helping her with a fresh start!



KEYONTAE:

Sometimes the road to success can be very long as it has been with Keontae, who we have been working with since December of 2021.

We've helped him in many ways including meeting his basic needs of food, clothing and transportation and housing.

He has always been working and doing well at his various jobs but never making enough to be able to save and have job security.

Until now as he's obtained a job with the City of Detroit Transportation Department and is almost done with his training to drive busses and also obtain his Commercial Driver License.

He now is earning a good living, has job security and job benefits of a retirement account, health care, vacation time etc.

Things are now falling into place very nicely. Keyontae is happy, and we are happy and proud of his determination.



CHEVELLE:

There's an old saying of "Any port in a storm," meaning getting help from any source during a difficult situation.

Thankfully we can be that port in a storm for many returning citizens and especially when an unanticipated emergency occurs.

Such as what just happened to Chevelle and his family as a faulty wire caused a fire and extensive damage to their home.

They did have insurance but that won't cover all their losses and they currently live in a hotel while their home is being repaired, which will take a while.

We were able to assist Chevelle with gift cards to replace many basic necessities as well as to purchase food etc.

It will be a slow road back, but it will occur and Chevelle remains optimistic. And we will continue to be that port in a storm.



EDRIS:

When one is sent to prison as a teenager and released as a man, there's a lot of difficulty in adjusting to life outside of prison walls. Especially when you spent just as much time in prison as the number of years you were alive at the time of sentencing.

Edris was sent to prison at 17 years of age and was recently released at 34 years of age.

The world has definitely changed a lot since 2007 and Edris has definitely changed as well and all for the better.

We met him after he'd been out just a few days and helped him with his basic needs and provided him job leads etc.

It will be a long road for Edris, but we will be there for him, and success is indeed in his future.



SHELLIE:

Sometimes the one thing holding a returning citizen back from self-sufficiency is getting enough hours at work. Simple economics.

They often don't receive full time hours as their employer would then have to pay health care etc. They struggle to find another part time job that won't conflict with hours at the first job. They can't afford housing and are often sleeping on a couch of a friend or relative.

Shellie has had her part time job at a library for a while now but tops out at 20 hours per week. We're assisting her in many ways and including providing her other part time opportunities.

Things will soon fall in place and then the path of self-sufficiency will quickly occur as we will be able to get her into her own housing, provide transportation etc.

Good things are around the corner for Shellie. No doubt about it!



MARQUES:

“The hardest working man in showbiz” was what they called the legendary soul singer James Brown.

Not quite the same ring to it but Marques is called the “highest earning parolee in the Lawton Parole Office in Detroit.”

Similar to James Brown, he works very hard at his job as an electrician and is paid well given his expertise and skill.

He’s still though sleeping on his cousin’s couch and helping with expenses there and helping out his mother as well.

We are working on budgeting with Marques right now and then will soon be assisting him into his own housing with furniture and home furnishings.

Marques will keep working hard, keep making good money, keep helping out his family and be a tremendous success story!



SEAN:

A shout out to Granddads who often take in a grandson returning from prison.

As it is with Sean who is living with his granddad, who drove Sean to meet us for the first time yesterday. Both are very nice individuals, and they are determined to make sure Sean becomes all he can be moving forward.

And Sean is on the right path as will be learning a skilled trade as he is young and will have a great future with job security etc. when he completes training to become a welder.

We are helping with his basic needs at present as he has only been out a few weeks. We'll also assist with all this tools and work clothes when his welding training program soon begins.

We're confident Sean will do great, and he also now has the guidance and wisdom of his granddad to continue to learn from!



JERMAINE:

Sometimes when it rains, it really pours. And pours.

Jermaine was released from prison last August and worked hard to get ahead and had a job as a high low driver. He was looking to improve his skills and income and enrolled in school to obtain a Commercial Driver License.

With no income while going to school full time, he started struggling and became homeless and is now sleeping in his vehicle. On top of all that, his father just died.

Jermaine is still moving forward and should finish school and take his CDL license test this week.

He'll then get a good paying job and things will quickly begin looking up for him. We are aiding Jermaine now to help keep him afloat until that job comes in and, at that time, we can get him into his own housing etc.

No more sleeping in his car. Better days ahead!



DARRYL and CHARLES:

Between them, Darryl and Charles have spent 77 years in prison as both entered as young men and recently exited when they were in their 60's.

There are greater challenges for older individuals who are reintegrating into society and who have spent most of their adult life in prison.

The world has obviously changed an incredible amount over that time frame and so has their support system as friends and family are no longer around.

We've helped both Darryl and Charles with clothes and other basic necessities and are assisting with their securing employment. Jobs at their age are more limited, but we will find them a good job, and they are both excited to begin working.

Their "second chapter" in life is beginning a bit later than others but it will still be a good one!



LEWIS:

When someone is released from prison, one of their first goals is to reestablish their relationship with their parents.

Lewis was away for 16 years, and he moved in with his father upon his return and has been helping him as much as he can as well as assisting his mother at her home.

Lewis has a very good job and is working 40 hours per week but still struggling with things like transportation as he now walks 40 minutes to and from work each day.

We have begun assisting him with getting into his own house rental and look forward to also assisting him with a used vehicle so he can get to work easier, as well as visit his mother and father as much as possible.

Redemption comes in many ways and being able to reconnect with one's parents is one of those ways. Lewis has definitely accomplished that goal!



WAYNE:

It is always generous when a friend or family member takes in a returning citizen as soon as they're released from prison.

However, there's not always an extra bed available and sleeping on the family room or basement couch is usually the best alternative.

That's where we come in and provide a mattress, box spring and frame and sheets and a blanket and pillows.

The next goal is to get these individuals employed and then into a place of their own to rent, and we can next help with additional furniture etc.

We just helped Wayne who, after 30 years in prison, came back to the home of his sister. We provided a bed etc. to get him off the couch and into a fully furnished bedroom of his own.

Much more comfortable nights of sleep ahead as Wayne will soon begin training for his Commercial Driver's License.



SEAN:

A big shout out to American Axle and Manufacturing in Auburn Hills! Talk about setting up returning citizens before they even leave prison.

American Axle goes to the prisons to hire people that have completed training in prison to learn the skill of CNC (computer numerical control).

Within weeks of getting home these people will begin work and be on their way to success. Such is the case with Sean who was released a week ago and will start work shortly.

He's living with his grandfather now and Sean will be able to save money quickly and we can soon get him into a place of his own. For now, we've helped him with all his basic necessities and work clothing.

Thanks to American Axle for their efforts in helping returning citizens and kudos to Sean for choosing to complete his training in prison and hit the ground running!



ERON:

A free man! Conviction vacated. That's Eron's story.

30 years is obviously an incredibly long time to languish in prison, after receiving a life sentence, while all the while working on getting your conviction overturned and being released.

But that is the perseverance that Eron showed, and he was finally released last week with his sentence vacated and he's currently a free man.

We helped him with his many needs for basic necessities and furniture and are assisting him with getting a job.

He's living in his niece's attic at present but as he says: "When you have been living in a cell for 30 years, an attic is very beautiful."

A long time coming, but good times are now and in the future. And we will be there to assist in many ways.



SUSANNE:

There's often a sense of trying to set things right, in a positive way, when someone returns from prison. Usually involving a desire to do good and contribute to their community through their actions.

As with Susanne, who's only been out of prison for a few months, but she recognizes some of the difficulties that those like herself face and she has put the wheels in motion to make a difference and set up a nonprofit of her own to help.

She is doing well and residing in transitional housing at present and just started a new job yesterday at M Cantina in Dearborn.

We've assisted her in various ways and will soon get her into her own housing. And she will continue forward with her great ideas of helping others in need.

Susanne has a very, very good heart and big things will occur with her generous efforts.



TYRONE:

An inmate has a few choices while in prison. Biding time until released or setting themselves up for success and pursuing available degrees or certifications and making the most of their time behind bars.

Tyrone was definitely the latter.

While in prison he obtained numerous degrees from Jackson Community College, including Business Management and he's currently completing his associate degree in science.

He's already been in touch with Wayne State University about pursuing his electrical engineering degree through their Educational Transition Coordination (ETC) Program, which helps formerly incarcerated people enroll in college.

We're helping Tyrone in many ways, including helping him locate a part time job while he completes his schooling.

He's very bright and set himself on a great path while in prison, and he's continuing that path now, and great times lay ahead.



MICHAEL:

Record setting time!

We meet people quickly after they've been released from prison but just experienced a new definition of "quickly" which may never be topped.

Michael submitted his application to us while riding home from prison and we met him less than 12 hours after.

Which is fast. Very fast.

Michael wanted to get things in motion as he's determined to be a great success story. He's already applying for jobs and looking into a career paths via welding and plumbing.

He's living in his sister's basement at present and we spruced that up with a bed, dresser, sheets, pillows, blanket, and towels and also helped him with gift cards to go towards clothing etc.

Michael is determined and dedicated and ready to work hard. We'll help him achieve his goal of being a great success story.



JEFFREY:

Living out of one's car is difficult to comprehend but it does happen to returning citizens who are without family or friends to assist with as little as a couch to sleep on.

Jeffrey was doing well and renting a room and working full time. All was good, until it wasn't as due to a parts shortage he and his co-employees were laid off.

Suddenly rent couldn't be paid and Jeffrey was evicted. At that point he started living in his car. He's since resumed employment and we just met him for the first time and began assisting him.

We are getting him into emergency housing and can then begin working on finding a rental home for him ASAP.

No one should be sleeping in their car.



TERRI:

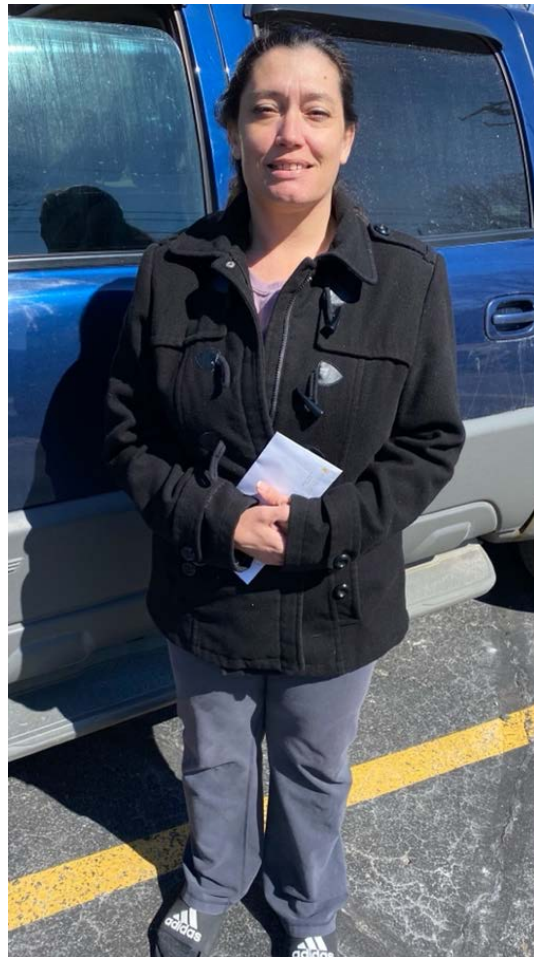
We're working with more and more female returning citizens, and many of them are pursuing their Commercial Driver's License, which is a great career choice.

We just met Teri, who is halfway done with her CDL program but experiencing transportation issues given that her training area is over 30 miles from her home.

Without an ongoing income the cost of gas alone was taking its toll, but then she began experiencing some issues with her car brakes.

We couldn't allow her to have come this far and have it all undone by transportation issues. So, we provided her funds for gasoline and took care of the cost of the car repair.

She's temporarily living with her daughter, and we will help Teri get her own place as soon as possible after she completes her CDL training and obtains employment. Smooth sailing ahead.



DARYL:

Most people are living in their own place in their 20's. The opposite of that may occur with returning citizens who can find themselves finally able to get into their own home for the first time when they are in their 50's.

As recently occurred with Daryl, who is just turning 60 this summer and is finally getting into that home.

It's been a long time coming and we've been assisting him since February of 2022. Daryl's been working consistently and doing great at his job, and he was finally able to save some money to go along with ours to cover the first month rent and security deposit.

He just moved in and couldn't be happier and prouder – as he should be and as we are for him. We further assisted with furniture and delivered a lot of home furnishings to him.

Daryl's apartment is now a wonderfully comfortable home. Finally!



CHRISTIAN:

A shout out to the Skills for Life program that allows returning citizens to gain the skills necessary for a trade job while also working for the City of Detroit.

It removes that constant struggle of trying to gain the skills and certification to have a career but how does one eat or pay for transportation or rent if they have no income.

An ongoing dilemma that the Skills for Life programs helps eliminate. As it did for Christian who, within a month of coming home, was enrolled in the program, and working to demolish blight in Detroit while also pursuing training to become an electrician.

He's on a great path of success and we have helped him with work clothes etc. and other basic necessities and furniture for his home he is renting with his elderly mother as well as a car repair.

Christian has a great trajectory of success. And a great smile! 😊



JIMMY:

Sometimes one enters prison as a very young, strong, and healthy individual and many years later exits as a senior citizen and burdened with medical issues.

Jimmy spent 40 years in prison for robbery, having gone in at 29 years of age. He just got out and we immediately met with him. He has some current health issues that will be addressed. But everything going on around him now is a very big adjustment.

We're doing all we can to assist him in acclimating to it all and Jimmy is definitely a different man both emotionally and physically than he was back in 1983.

He's currently living with his niece, in her basement, and we have assisted him with all his basic necessities at this point including his desire to have the calming sound from a radio.

We're not going to say this transition will be all smooth sailing for Jimmy, but we are going to make certain the waters are as calm as we can make them.



DEMETRIES:

Not going to lie. At the time we are meeting returning citizens in person for the first time, they will very often shed tears.

It's not about being out of prison for the first time in years. It's more about the emotion that comes from someone helping them for what is often the first time in their life.

Demetries has been out almost a year and has been struggling before he just sought our help. In his application he said:

“I just hope for some aid. I don't desire to be a burden. And will do whatever I need to give back whatever help you provide me. Just need to get on my feet and having a hard time doing so. Just trying to do right for me and my sons.”

We met him the other day and discussed all we could do, and he was very emotional and cried. We've now gotten him a job and provided work clothing and other basic necessities. The next step will be getting him into his own housing as he's couch surfing.

He's very appreciative and now excited for his future. Good things ahead!



RICARDO:

Getting a job is so critical to returning citizens not only for the income but just as important for their mental health.

Employment provides a sense of confidence, positive identity, purpose and achievement, an opportunity for positive relationships and a platform for structured routines, among many other benefits.

When we help someone get a job they are so happy to be working and will often send a photo from their first day of work, as Ricardo just did.

He is working for Leadpoint recycling company and is very excited and happy. He sent us the accompanying photo right after he started work.

We will soon help him get his own place to live and provide him furniture and household goods.

With this job, Ricardo's mental health is definitely on the upswing!



BERNARION:

Sometimes the key to success as a returning citizen is to recognize what situations are those that one needs to remove themselves from.

That's not always easy when it means moving out of a home you were living in with family members which turned out to be a more difficult situation than one should endure.

Such is the case with Bernarion who has been working full time and living with family members but needed to remove himself from that environment. The difficulty when we first met him was he was living in a hotel and paying way too much of his income for that room.

We assisted him with new clothing and work clothes and are helping him locate a home to rent as well as providing him car repairs that he hasn't been able to afford due to the high hotel expense.

We're getting Bernarion back on track to his path to success and the road is becoming smoother each day.



BRANDON:

It's always great to get a returning citizen into a trade school program for a lot of good reasons. Trade schools, such as for welding, masonry, HVAC, CDL's etc. will offer people a fast and affordable path towards a well-paying career that's in high demand with benefits.

Right away they are getting hands on experience and when one finishes the program, job placement will occur in a hurry. We do encourage that path and discuss with everyone we meet about learning a skilled trade.

Brandon was interested in learning welding and is already halfway through the program and is doing great. His trajectory of success is very high and coming quickly.

We've helped him with his needs and look forward to providing him the required items he needs for his profession when he graduates. He's excited and proud, as are we!



Enjoy the spring weather!

All the best,

Bob