

JUNE NEWSLETTER

It was a great month for getting people into skilled trades programs which is always exciting since that path leads to a much more stable career which pays more and provides benefits etc.

Lots of people get their Commercial Driver's License but many get training in other areas such as welding, masonry, carpentry, electrical etc.

The problem though is having no income during the training process and your bills start accumulating and it becomes the classic Catch 22. You strive to be successful by pursuing a career path but in doing so you face being evicted for failure to pay rent, have no money for food, gasoline, car note etc.

That's where we come in as we do all we can to keep people afloat during their skilled training program. We see it as a great investment by us for someone in making sure that he/she continues forward because once they graduate, it's blue skies ahead!

So, there are a few of those types of stories in June's Newsletter that we hope you enjoy them along with all the other great stories of wonderful success!

ALPHONSO:

On April 20th, the news finally arrived after 18 long years for Alphonso.

The Conviction Integrity United came through and Alphonso was able to walk out of prison as a free and innocent man.

We met up with him a few days later and far from bitter, he is excited for his future and appreciative of all we have done for him and will do in the future.

His plan is a good one and that is to enroll in school to get his Commercial Driver's License and have a great career. He has a very good attitude, despite all that he has been through and the inequity of having spent so many years behind bars for something he was not involved in at all.

Thankfully the truth emerged, and he is a free man now and we look forward to joining him on his path of success as we assist Alphonso moving forward.



DARREN

Beating an addiction is very difficult and, often, going into rehab for substance abuse is the best solution.

Darren had struggled with substance abuse, all of which led to his incarceration. That said, no treatment is offered in prison and very often people are released with the same addictive issues.

Darren successfully completed treatment after he got out and, thankfully, the plumbing business he had worked at previously was kind enough to give him a second chance. He's resumed his job and is doing great and earning a very good income.

We have helped him with work clothing and all the work tools and equipment Darren needs to be successful as maintaining his current job is critical to his ongoing recovery.

We plan to soon move him into his own home. He's doing very well so far, and we anticipate that will all continue.

He's very determined, and it is showing at his job and the choices he is making. Way to go Darren!



MATTHEW:

Although it may sound strange, one positive thing that comes out of living with others in a transitional housing setting once released from prison is that it provides a strong impetus to get out of that situation.

It's often a crowded residence and those we meet want immediate assistance in getting into a place of their own.

It's not always a quick thing though as the person has to be employed and have saved money to contribute to their move in costs.

Matthew was living in a large transitional housing place since he was released and now has a good job with M-97 Auto parts and paid for half of his move in costs to a rental home. We helped with the remainder and provided him furniture and home furnishings.

He's doing great and very happy and excited to be living alone and being self-sufficient. Matthew is a great success story!



JACQUELINE:

Every little thing contributes to the success of returning citizens. Such as a friend or family member providing a place to stay to someone upon their release from prison, or helping one get to and from work when they first begin their job etc.

Or when a family friend reaches out to offer what they can and that may be a job until someone gets on their feet. A job really created for that returning citizen as opposed to the business truly needing someone immediately in that position.

As with Jacqueline who got a job through a family friend to work in their business office. All within days of Jacqueline having been released.

We met with her at that time and got her set with basic necessities as well all the work clothes she would need.

All good with the generosity of family friends doing the best they can. Very kind.



ROBERT:

We started working with Robert in August of 2022 when he was released and assigned to transitional housing because he had nowhere else to go. No family or friends in the area.

Fast forward nine months and he has moved into his own apartment and is working for Heating Treating Services in Pontiac as an industrial mechanic and making good money.

However, transportation was an issue as he is working third shift and there was difficulty getting bus rides and ride sharing such as Uber and Lyft is very expensive for him.

Through our Working Cars for Working People program we were able to provide Robert with a nice Grand Prix vehicle which will make his life infinitely easier without having to worry about getting to and from work or getting anywhere.

He's definitely earned it!



DEVONTE:

Encouragement.

We all welcome it, along with positive reinforcement. It helps to keep us going and returning citizens are no different and we strive to give that support and encouragement.

Such as with Devonte, who has been doing well and has been working with the Detroit Water and Sewage Department and performing great. But life presents unanticipated hurdles at times and even more so with returning citizens who may experience certain roadblocks that the average person doesn't.

We met Devonte the other day and among other parts of our conversation we discussed, in working together, all that we could do for him to help him stay on his path of success.

He was very appreciative of our discussion and within a few minutes of leaving he had texted:

“Nice meeting you! I really look forward to seeing you again in the near future. Thanks a million. It's help like this that makes me keep moving forward and keeps me continuing to work hard. Thanks again for everything.”

Our pleasure.



ALBERT:

Another wow, wow, wow story of a JLWOP case. That being a juvenile who was sentenced to life in prison without the chance of parole.

Thankfully, given a change in the law, these cases are now open for review and re-sentencing. Such as with Albert who was just released from prison the other day after being sentenced as a JLWOP from a crime he committed at 17 years of age.

He spent a whopping 43 years in prison!

Albert is readjusting to a life on the outside that he hasn't experienced in over four decades and what he remembers last as a teenager.

We are doing all we can to help with his adjustment and assist with his basic necessities and a job that he can handle at his age and skill level.

It is definitely not an easy transition, but Albert is determined, and we will be beside him and helping him moving forward.



JAMES:

James was less than 24 hours out of prison when we met him. He's very excited to do all he can to help others not go down the same alcohol fueled path which ultimately landed him behind bars.

He's been sober for awhile now and definitely had time in prison to reflect and also to start planning for the future. He is now a college graduate and plans to return to get his masters in psychology to help others with counseling and serve as a mentor to young people.

He also obtained a degree in optometry while in prison and using that optical training is his plan as well.

He's living in his sister's basement, and we helped him with basic necessities and got him furniture for his living situation, and took care of getting his driver road test to get his license.

Big things are expected from James, and we look forward to traveling with him on his path of success!



Kenny:

“Things can change in a minute.”

That’s what Kenny said to us when we met up again recently. We first met some time back, but he found himself back in prison due to a split-second decision, which arose by helping a homeless friend, resulted in his violating a term of his parole.

All he had achieved up to that point after initially getting out of prison, was quickly washed away.

He was now coming back to us, and he was back to square one.

He’s working hard again, and we are doing our best to help him as he definitely has potential as he had achieved success before.

We are not going to give up on him and we recognize he’s doing all that’s being asked of him now.

Things can change in a minute as Kenny said, but they can also change over time and all for the better. That’s where he’s headed now.



DWAYNE:

Kindness.

Dwayne exhibited this the first time we met. The majority of prison sentences don't stem from crimes of violence but are considered "victimless crimes" such as drug possession etc.

When we first met, Dwayne was waiting his turn as we were meeting, individually, with 12 returning citizens that day.

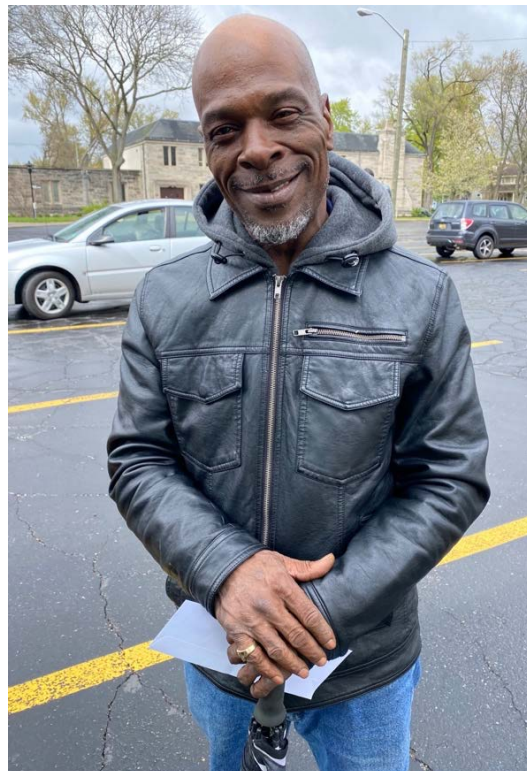
Suddenly, the rain and wind picked up and he could see that the phone, used to take notes from our conversations with those that we were meeting, was getting very wet.

Dwayne quickly sprang into action and raced back to his vehicle to retrieve a large umbrella that he opened and silently handed it to us to protect the phone, and us, from the elements. Very nice.

Dwayne is indeed generous. His goal is to mentor youngsters regarding the impact of drugs, and prison etc. and keep those individuals on the right path.

The path that Dwayne is on now as he is working, and we will get him into his own housing very shortly.

He is very good at present. And kind.



KELVIN:

One more shoutout to the Michigan Innocence Clinic who obtained the release from prison of another innocent man.

Kelvin, after spending the last eight years in prison and after having been sentenced to life in 2014, was finally declared innocent and released from prison.

We work with way too many exonerees and it's great when organizations like the Michigan Innocence Clinic get someone else released from prison, it would be a better situation if people were not getting wrongfully convicted.

We're helping Kelvin with all his current and future needs as he works on getting his life back together.

Below is a photo of Kelvin getting out of prison along with those from the Innocence Clinic who fought for his release, and his mom and sister. And a photo from our recent meeting.

Home again. Free again!



RYAN:

There's the old saying that "Pride goeth before a fall" and regarding returning citizens it means don't be too proud to ask for help when you need to.

Some individuals think they can do it for themselves and at times that's a wonderful attitude to have.

But there's enough hurdles present for those coming back from prison, that when one needs assistance it is best to ask for it.

Ryan was doing great and working for Amazon and making a good living. He saved up for his security deposit and first month rent and moved into his own place. All on his own.

But his hours were cut at work, and he suddenly was struggling to pay this month's rent. He reached out to us for assistance, and we took care of his rent, and he is going to be fine moving forward as he just picked up a second job at Marriott.

We also helped with the remaining furniture he needed as well as provided him with lots of home furnishings. He was very appreciative and just needed a little assistance in getting past a current hurdle.

Nothing wrong with asking for help when needed. All good!



SADO:

While we do what we do via our returning citizens program, there are many organizations we work with who do great things.

This includes the State Appellate Defender Office (SADO) who concentrates on assisting juvenile offenders, who have served many, many years in prison after having been sentenced for life.

Including recently helping all those in the graphic below and all of whom who we are working with right now in helping with their readjustment now that they are out of prison. Some having been away for over 50 years.

Kenneth, Ervin, Montez and Robert were all sentenced to life in prison as juveniles and all are now released from prison to begin their journey of re-acclimating to society. Good work SADO.

We are here to help now and moving forward, with each one of them, and striving to meet all of their many needs!



Kenneth Barnett (pictured with Jose Burgos from SADO's Project Reentry)



Montez Stovall (pictured with SADO team, Chelsea Richardson, Adrienne Young, and Sofia Nelson)



Robert Goodyear (pictured with Anna Kohn of Project Reentry)

welcome home!

A hearty congratulations to SADO juvenile lifer clients who rejoined our community so far in 2023. The five men in these photos represent over 180 years of time served.



Ervin Jennings (pictured with Safe & Just Michigan's Ken Nixon)



Albert Garrett

GREG:

We've received a lot of different descriptions from returning citizens on what it feels like returning to their community after many years away in prison.

But there is no better description than what Greg told us when he described what he was feeling after only being out for a few days (and after 14 years in prison):

“It feels like life is coming at me at 100 miles an hour and I am on a tricycle with a bad wheel and trying to keep up.”

That about says it all. He's been overwhelmed from things like new technology including navigating trying to apply for jobs on a cell phone, which he'd never had before.

We helped him in various ways and are trying to further assist Greg by slowing things down a bit and removing his feelings of being overwhelmed.

We made some headway and will keep moving him forward at a comfortable pace. We gave him a great job lead and he should be employed shortly, and things will quickly begin looking up for Greg!



John:

It's difficult enough to overcome the general hurdles of coming back from prison, but when you're suddenly homeless it all becomes way more difficult.

That's what happened to John after he was in the Federal halfway house, and he had to leave there and had no family or friends to move in with.

Without anyone's assistance he became homeless and eventually made his way to the Detroit Rescue Mission shelter.

Thankfully, he was able to obtain a job at Alro Steel and was then referred to us by someone else we recently helped.

John's a very hard worker and after one month of work he's already advancing at the company and being trained in operating a hi-low and an overhead crane.

We helped John out with all his basic necessities, and we will soon get John out of the shelter and into his very own housing.

Bright skies are ahead!



CHAD:

A major hurdle for those coming back from prison is that they may have a particular job-related skill/expertise, but the problem is they've been away for years and any of their tools/equipment that they previously used in their field of employment are long gone.

They may be able to get a job with the company they previously worked for or a new company, but without those required tools and equipment they can't start their job and be successful.

That's where we come in.

We can get them going without any loss of time by quickly providing them everything they need.

As we just did with Chad, who has expertise in plumbing and needed a lot of items to get things rolling. Very fast, we got things going for him and supplied everything required and he's now working and doing great!

Chad just needed some help to move forward and we're glad we could fill that need. All good!



LEONARD:

Here we go again as we just met another returning citizen who went to prison for over 45 years for a crime committed as a juvenile.

All they know after 45 plus years away, is prison life. They know nothing of life out here where it is now an incredibly difficult path and one with no family or friends around.

Leonard went to prison for 49 years after committing a crime at 17. We met him shortly after he was released and he's now staying in transitional housing for a few months until he has to leave.

We're doing all we can to assist him as he currently has no income and a job will obviously be difficult given his age and lack of experience. We helped with all his current needs of clothes etc.

Hopefully Social Security will come in soon. Leonard is receiving counseling and it's our goal to get him into his own housing as soon as possible and provide him some measure of normalcy in his current life of adjustment.

Not an easy path but one we will make as smooth as possible for Leonard.



ERIC:

After November 5, 2010, Eric's life would never be the same. On that date, he was convicted of armed robbery and assault. Crimes he was completely innocent of, as he was nowhere near the scene of the robbery.

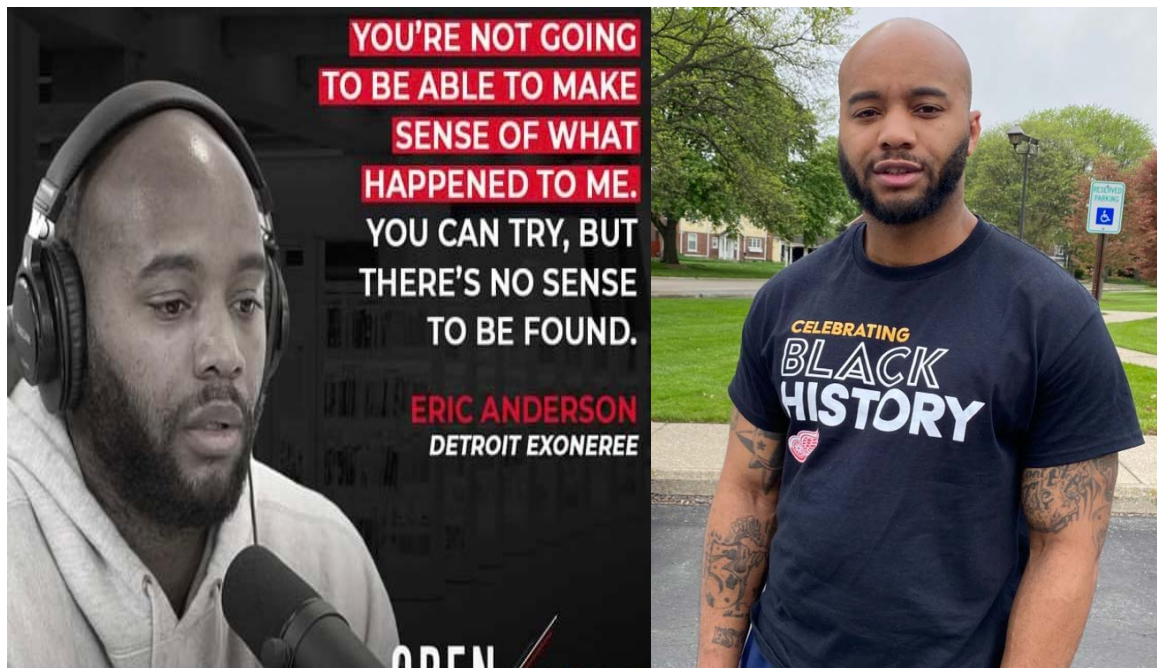
Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Eric was convicted and sentenced to 13-20 years in prison.

Finally, years later, the Michigan Innocence Clinic got ahold of his case and he would eventually be exonerated as, amongst other evidence, there was a confession by the person who actually committed the crime.

Eric has spent time trying to get his life together again and just got a great job with Nation Outside, an advocacy organization led by the formerly incarcerated.

We've begun helping Eric with work clothes and other items and are soon getting him into his own housing as well as his own vehicle he will need for his job.

It was a difficult time getting to the mind space Eric's at now, but the future is very bright with lots of good ahead!



MELISSA:

When we are asked what is one of biggest hurdles for returning citizens, the answer is transportation.

We can help someone get employment, but it's often very hard to get to and from that job and especially when you are working 2nd or 3rd shift hours.

Buses may not be running, friends and families aren't available that time of night or early morning, Uber or Lyft is way too expensive etc.

One of our more popular sub-programs is our Road Ready Repairs as that definitely helps with transportation issues where someone has a car available to them from a family member or friend, but it needs repairs to get it running.

We just helped Melissa get her vehicle repaired so she can get on the road and to her job without any issues. As she said: "It is a great hurdle you removed for me. Thank you so very much!"

Transportation issues resolved. All good!



DAVID:

We really, really hear this type of comment a lot:

“My mother and father both passed while I was in prison, so I really don’t have anybody in my corner at the moment to help guide me through life. So, this program is a huge help for me! Thank for being there.”

That was David the other day after we had met for the first time. Depending on how long one has been away, there definitely is the issue of being released from prison to no one. No family, no friends, no anyone.

We welcome the opportunity to fill that void and be a shoulder to lean on for guidance, support, counsel etc.

Being a friendly support system on the other end of a text is all that is needed, at times, to curb the anxious thoughts of being out of prison and feeling alone.

Glad to be there for you David and look forward to always being there for you and watching you progress nicely on your path of success!



TAVARES:

A very happy ending for another returning citizen who had been sentenced to life in prison without parole for a crime committed as a 17-year-old.

We first met Tavares in March, right after he was released from prison after 28 years and after he had been re-sentenced due to his having been sentenced as a juvenile.

We helped him with basic necessities at that point and he very quickly was working full time and was ready to move into his very first place of his own and along with his girlfriend Karen.

He's very proud of how quickly he has accomplished his goal of having his own place, and we are proud of him as well. We helped Tavares with his move in costs along with home furnishings.

A lot of great things have occurred for Tavares over the last few months. We look forward to all the great things that are still to come!



DOBEYONTIA:

We always encourage returning citizens to pursue a career path and to learn a skilled trade etc.

So, it was great to see DobeYontia enroll in a welding program and five weeks later get his certification. He got a great job, earning good money etc. All was all good, until.....

.....the home he was living in caught fire and he lost all his possessions. He's completely starting over now.

We are helping him with that process and provided him gift cards to obtain clothing etc. and are assisting him in finding another home to rent. We can then help DobeYontia with his move in costs and with furniture and home furnishings.

Sometimes things just happen out of nowhere. Both good and bad. The fire was obviously bad, but we are here to help him get back into a good environment once again and continue the success of his welding career.

All will soon be good again!



DARRYL:

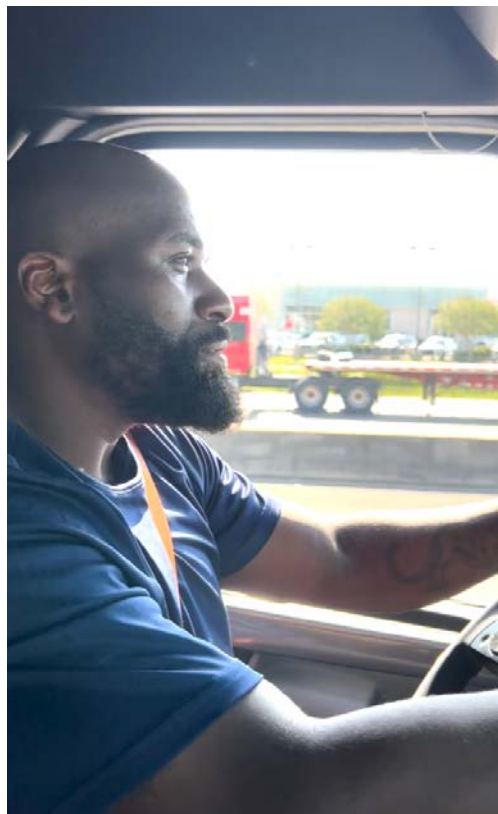
A great, great photo from Darryl who is, proudly, at his new job after graduating from training and getting his Commercial Driver License.

We've been side by side with Darryl ever since he started his training. We helped with clothing, school supplies, work clothes, car repairs, food, gasoline etc. and whatever he needed to keep going forward and successfully finish school.

He graduated and got a job with Western Express Trucking. We then assisted with specific clothing, work boots as well as a required sleeping bag etc. Everything he needed to keep moving forward until such time as he was on the road with his own truck.

And that time has now come as Darryl sent us the following photo. A long time coming, lots of hard work, but everything in place now and a great, great success story!

And he texted: "Thanks for everything! I really appreciate you sir and if it wasn't for your help, I don't think I would have made it through my CDL class. I am forever grateful!"



MARTEIZ:

Often when we help a returning citizen there are others who are very appreciative of our efforts. And that's parents.

As it was when we met the mother of Marteiz the other day. Marteiz is wonderful success story as he pursued a skilled trade of welding and just graduated with all required certifications and immediately got a great job through the Sheet Metal Welders Union

We began working with him last February and have helped in many ways since then. The new job began the other day, and he needed assistance with work clothes, tools and gasoline to get to work.

We enthusiastically helped him out in getting all those items, so he'd be all set to be successful at his new job. We met his mother, Kimberly, while Marteiz was at work, to supply everything he needed.

She broke down with tears of appreciation for our help for her and her husband's only child.

Way to go Marteiz! You've come a long way in a few short months. Congratulations! You made us proud and your parents.



GREGORY:

Once someone enters our returning citizens program they never leave. We're forever there to help with whatever needs arise.

At present we are up to 3500 returning citizens who are part of our program since it was launched in August of 2020.

So, it's not unusual for us to still be helping those who began with us then as we just did with Gregory.

We've helped him in many ways including getting a job, move in costs, furniture, home furnishings, work clothes, gasoline, food etc.

We also provided him a used vehicle which was donated to us.

Unfortunately, that car very prematurely experienced an engine problem and suddenly Gregory was having trouble getting to his great job at Providence Hospital.

We just helped him get another vehicle and all is good again.

Gregory is a wonderful success story as he has come a long way since he began working with us and is a very good friend.



Darnell, Maurice and Curtis:

One thing that's often hard to shake with a returning citizen is having their identity tied to their prison ID number, which they know all too well and often use with their texts and emails to us.

Helping shed that number is getting a good job where one feels part of something and proudly has a badge with their name and the name of their employer.

All of which they often share with us as Darnell, Curtis and Maurice just did as they are now all gainfully employed with, respectively, Goodwill Industries, Huntington Place and Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO).

We have helped all three of them in many ways including all the work clothes they needed for their new employment.

All wearing a badge of accomplishment and something to be proud of for sure! Bye, bye prison ID number.



JASMINE:

Thankfully our criminal system has a process of appeal as sometimes things simply are not done correctly, and convictions are overturned.

As in the case of Jasmine, who spent four years in prison before Michigan's Supreme Court overturned her conviction and she was released.

She's been doing well since then having held her current job for 18 months now and has received promotions and has another one occurring shortly.

Her 15-year-old son is an honors student in High School and Jasmine, and he are set to move into their first rental home.

We've been working with her since she got out last December and have helped her in many ways and it is now our pleasure to assist her with her move in costs, new furniture and home furnishings.

It has been a long road, but she has persevered in many ways and has worked very hard to get herself to this place of independence and success for her and her son. Way to go Jasmine!



SAMITRA:

Similar to the motto of Jimmy John's delivery of "Freaky fast!," we also pride ourselves on the speed in which we can assist people.

Samitra witnessed that, as she just got hired into a new job at Tyson Foods. She has a family vehicle to use to get to work. But having just gotten back from prison, she has no money for gas to get to work and over the next two weeks before she is paid.

We had this very common type of text exchange with her when she contacted us for help:

"Have you checked with your parole agent regarding gas cards? They do assist with that need."

"Yes, she told me it would take a week or more and I start tomorrow!"

Others may have help to offer but can't do it in time. We took care of her need immediately and she was incredibly appreciative. She will be at first day of work, and in the future, on time and with gas in her tank.

We are "Freaky fast" as well!



NAPOLEON:

Returning citizens often do so much in their effort to move forward, including getting multiple jobs and having little time at present for anything other than work.

Napoleon is working for the City of Detroit's Blight Department as he clear properties citywide of debris/solid waste/brush/dumping and two days a week he is learning the skilled trade for becoming an electrician.

But that's not enough for him right now as he is getting a part time job also as he lives with his elderly mother and assists with her needs and expenses.

He has no complaints at all though and is just focused on improving his life and doing whatever it takes to accomplish that goal.

Napoleon is a great success story and it's our pleasure to assist him as he continues forward on his path of success.

