

MAY NEWSLETTER

Another great month with some beautiful stories including finally meeting someone we'd emailed back and forth with in prison on over 300 occasions as we established a great relationship before he was released.

A shout out to the City of Detroit for being willing to give a second chance to returning citizens and hiring many of those we work with.

There's a great story of someone going from homeless to housing to a used vehicle from us in a very short time.

We had some lovely "reunion" meetings which occur when people who knew each other in prison coincidentally attend a meeting with us on the same time/day and see each other and get a chance to rekindle their friendship on the outside of prison.

We have the good news of someone's cancer going into remission and we had many people getting great jobs after obtaining their Commercial Driver Licensee.

And a story of someone sentenced as a 17-year-old and finally getting out of prison after 30 long years and now getting to experience the joys that life can offer.

All these stories are great feel-good stories, and we hope you enjoy them as much as we enjoyed being a part of them!

CHRISTIAN, AARON, AND THOMAS:

Since we meet a lot of returning citizens each day of the week and at the same times at a couple of locations, it is inevitable that some of those coming on the same day were friends together in prison.

Many will have lost touch as they were released on different dates etc. but when they show up on the same day to meet us, well it is a very nice experience for all with a lot of hugs going around.

Such as occurred the other day when Christian, Aaron and Thomas came to meet us and crossed paths again with each other, for the first time, after prison.

All three are doing great as Christian and Aaron are employed with the City of Detroit and Thomas just passed his Commercial Driver's License training.

We are helping all three of them with a lot of common needs and also with many things that are unique to their individual situation.

All three are on a great path of success and plan to now stay in touch with each other on the outside. A nice reunion all around!



WILLIAM:

One of the greatest joys we experience in operating our Returning Hope to Returning Citizens program is to encounter someone at their lowest and swiftly assist them until they are in a much, much better situation and happy and self-sufficient.

This occurred with William who had been out of prison a little while when he first contacted us. He wasn't working and was living in a homeless shelter.

Flash forwards a few months later and he's working for the City of Detroit as a bus driver and was recently able to move into his fully furnished apartment that we helped him with, and we just provided him a used vehicle to help him get to work.

He's a happy, happy man now and we are ecstatic for his success. A long road coming, but all is great now!



BATINA:

Woo-hoo! There is not much better than seeing a returning citizen achieve a major goal on their path of success!

We met Batina in February and have helped in various ways including a critical car repair to enable her to continue to get to truck driving school while she completed her training.

And yesterday she texted us the following note and photo as she is very excited (as are we) to have just graduated from truck driving school! She said:

“Praise the LORD! I just graduated! I’m officially a truck driver now. Thank you so very much for helping me with everything, including the cost of repairs for my car so I could get to school. Thank you for all you’ve done for me. I really, really appreciate you. GOD BLESS YOU!!”

We are so happy for Batina’s success. A good job is coming soon and self-sufficiency and all the good things that her perseverance, dedication and hard work have achieved! Congrats Batina!



AMANDA:

Talk about hitting the ground running. Amanda had a new job with a few days of getting out of prison after two years away and after starting that job she found a higher paying position and is now working at that job.

All accomplished within a week of being released and we met her in person the same day we received her application.

Amanda is not only working on being successful at her job and saving money while living with her parents, but she's also working hard at being a great mother to her daughters of 12 and 19 years of age (who also live with Amanda's parents).

We helped Amanda with all her basic necessities and work clothes, and we will soon be assisting her with her move in costs to a home of her own, along with furniture and household goods.

She's successfully mending fences, doing well at her new job, and looking forward to being self-sufficient and having her daughters live with her at her new home. All wonderful things!



QUINDALE:

A shout out to the City of Detroit who is willing to employ returning citizens and also provide training, so they can learn a skilled trade and have great job security, benefits, and solid income.

Quindale has been working full time with the City of Detroit since last December and is about to start training, through his job, for a Commercial Driver's License.

Once he's finished with obtaining his CDL the job opportunities with the City will be plentiful and he will receive a nice jump in pay.

We have helped him in various ways and look forward to getting him into his own housing and then providing him a used vehicle to eliminate any difficulties in getting to and from work.

Quindale is doing very well and most times the success of returning citizens is based on having an opportunity. So, thanks to the City of Detroit for providing that opportunity!



ERON:

Our program is well known amongst those currently in prison, and who do have the opportunity to reach us from prison by email through JPay.

We often communicate with prisoners and establish a relationship with them even before they are even released.

As we did with Eron, who first contacted us months before being released and we met him within a day after he came back home.

JPay email is a great way to connect with prisoners before they are released, and we can provide a bit of hope with info re: what we can do to make things easier when they are on the outside.

We've begun helping Eron with all the many things we can assist him with and all the things that he knew about us given our email exchanges while he was in prison.

Welcome home Eron!



JUSTIN, PATRICK, TAJ:

Before one leaves prison, they must have approved housing in place and that may be with a relative or a friend etc.

Many people don't have either of those options and are placed in a transitional housing situation. Often a group of individuals arrive together to that housing situation and quickly become friends as they are all in the same boat.

On many occasions, they will all apply for our help at the same time and will schedule to meet with us in person on the same date/time.

As just occurred with Justin, Patrick and Taj who met us recently as we addressed all their current needs on an individual basis and together discussed all we could do for them moving forward.

It's always good to have other people travel with you down the same path and Justin, Patrick and Taj are doing so as they explore their reintegration into society after having been gone for a few years.

Much success lies ahead for all three of these determined individuals.



BRANDON:

Often for a returning citizen, just when you think that all hurdles have been cleared and you are on a good path of success - things happen! As they did for Brandon.

We met him in January and began helping him and soon thereafter he was enrolled in school for his Commercial Driver's License.

He was doing great and passed his written test and thereafter passed the more rigorous driving test. All was good but suddenly there was a change amongst employers that they wanted drivers who had at least three months of experience driving trucks.

Classic Catch-22. Can't get experience if no one will hire you to get it. But Brandon persisted and found an out of state company willing to hire him. Only problem was he needed to get to Texas for one week of orientation.

We helped get him there as well as assisting with sheets, blankets, and pillows for his bed in the truck he would be driving as well as lots of work clothes etc. Putting him in the best position for success!

Great things are ahead for Brandon after much hard work on his end!



CHRISTOPHER

We've said it again and again. Returning citizens make great employees. Now, Detroit Deputy Mayor Todd Bettison is saying that as well:

"One of the things that I've heard, feedback from companies, whether it's manufacturing or whatever company that hires individuals with records, especially our formerly incarcerated individuals, is that they're the hardest working folks at the company."

Christopher falls into that "hardest working" category. He's in school for HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) from 9am-1pm and is also working a factory job from 10pm-6am because he needs an income while going to school.

That's a pretty impressive work ethic for sure. Once he completes his HVAC degree things will smooth out a bit, so he doesn't have to work the night shift and also attend HVAC training.

We are assisting him now and will moving forward, and much success lies ahead for Christopher.



STEVEN:

Hope is often everything to keep someone going. A bit of a pep talk to provide confidence and enthusiasm.

Returning citizens can feel completely overwhelmed as they've have been away from society for years. Things have changed in many ways. They're often alone, without any support, and struggling to adjust.

When we first met Steven, he was struggling, facing problems from getting turned down from jobs because of his background to trying to transfer his parole so he could move and take classes at Wayne State.

We began helping him in various ways to make his situation better and help him achieve success and we gave him a pep talk.

Steven texted us the next morning: *"It was a pleasure to meet with you. I was at my lowest and you gave me a lot of motivation for this journey I am now on. I appreciate your guidance! Now let's see my success story play out with the influence you have along with my drive and determination. You've given me hope and your program is a tool to cultivate a mindset to believe in a second chance in life with the help you guys provide."*

Sometimes, one only needs simple words of encouragement.



TORRENCE:

It's exactly the type of info we just hate to receive but it happens. The unanticipated emergency that changes everything.

We've been working with Torrence for a while and helped in many ways including getting him into his apartment, furnishing it etc. He'd been on a great path of success with a good job etc. Yesterday he texted:

“I'm reaching out to you because the apartment that you helped me acquire and furnish, caught on fire last night. It was all over the news. I've lost absolutely everything, and I need some immediate help. Please contact me ASAP to help me sort this catastrophe out. Please and thank you!”

We immediately jumped into action and are finding Torrence a new place to live (he's temporarily with a relative) and are replacing the items he needs immediately including clothes/work clothes etc.

No way around it, this is a horrible situation, but we are helping Torrence see the light out of this dark tunnel and get him back to where he was before the fire!



LAVELLE:

300 emails later.....

Yes, over two years ago, we got an email from a prisoner who was reaching out because he'd heard of our program.

We didn't know then that we were starting an ongoing stream of communication with LaVelle that would comprise over 300 emails! A lot went on over those two years including his transferring prisons, delays with parole hearings, COVID spreading throughout prison, letters of support we sent to his parole board which proved helpful etc.

We established a strong friendship and were looking forward to the day that we could meet and give a hug and a handshake. That day finally happened this week as LaVelle is now out of prison and we are ready to assist him in any way possible.

He's bright, generous in thought and deed and determined to never go back to prison and be a powerful contributing member to his community.

We expect big things from him, and we will enjoy continuing our friendship on the outside.



CHRISTOPHER:

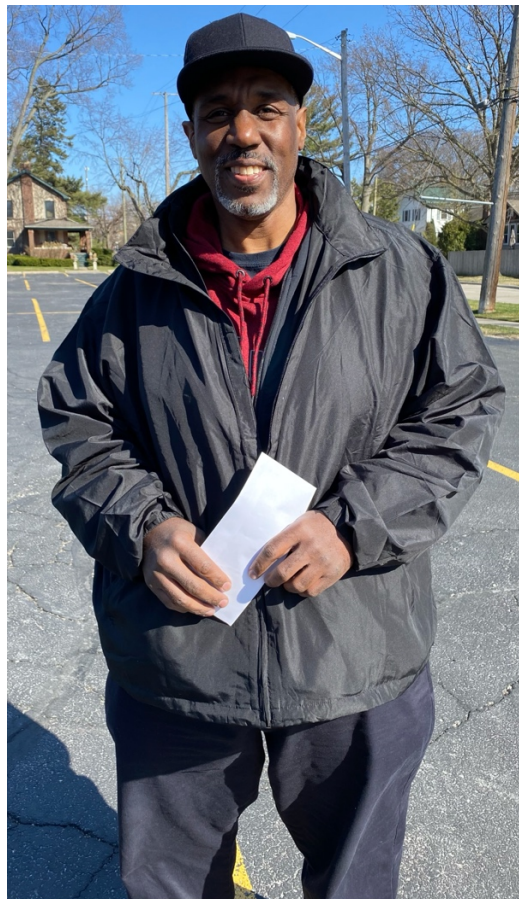
Freaky fast.

That is what we call things when the time frame is remarkably quick between when we meet someone for the first time, and aid with basic necessities, and when they return for more assistance because they have obtained employment based on the job leads we provide.

The time frame can be as short as 24 hours as it was with Christopher who met, and it was clear he was a go getter. And go he did as he contacted us the next morning that he had obtained employment with a construction company and would be starting the next day.

We met him again that afternoon and provided him additional assistance to obtain all work clothes and boots that he needed along with help with tools for the job.

We want to put him in the best opportunity for success by having everything he needed to start the job.



JAMES:

Cancer is a shock of a diagnosis.

Returning citizens face a lot of hurdles to get over when they are released, but they also can encounter challenges in other ways such as being diagnosed with cancer after getting out of prison.

That's what James encountered when we met him over two years ago and began working with him. We've helped him in many ways since then and did all we could to assist as he navigated the many issues in being released from prison at 73 years of age and, on top of that, going through all the treatment for his cancer.

We were able to get him into his own home and make him is comfortable as possible. He's always had a wonderfully upbeat attitude despite his challenges.

He just let us know the news we were always hopeful to hear. That being his cancer is in remission!

Wonderful news to receive from James and so excited for the relief he can now experience. Woo hoo!!



MACK:

Wow!

Sentenced to 25-50 years in prison for a robbery back in 2014, Mack Howell was finally released from prison the other day after the Conviction Integrity Unit determined he was completely innocent.

So now, after almost 8 years in prison and at 61 years of age, Mack is back home and adjusting to the world around him. He was the victim, as all those years in prison had been robbed from him.

We are doing all we can to assist in his adjustment, including helping him get into a home of his own. Mack, a soft-spoken man, said: "I'm so glad to be out. It's amazing, feels good."

His family never gave up on him. His nephew Dwayne said: "We kept fighting for him, over and over again. He was walking us through every step of the way. He was fighting for his innocence. We're happy to get him out."

As are we and glad to be able to help Mack now with all he needs as he rebuilds his life and stays positive.



MONTEZ:

Imagine being punished for life based on something we did in high school.

Montez was sentenced to life in prison back in 1993 for his actions as a 17-year-old. After 30 years in prison and after his sentence was ruled to be unconstitutional, Montez was finally released from prison.

We met him the other day, shortly after he got out, and we immediately helped him with a phone and other basic necessities including clothing and food.

He's already obtained his driver's license and soon will be enrolling in class to get his Commercial Driver's License. Then he'll get a good career driving a truck and continue forward on a path of success.

It's obviously been a long time getting to this point as he hasn't been part of society since he was 17 years old.

A big adjustment for sure but we will help him now and forever!



DARRYL:

Another happy and high achieving returning citizen!

Darryl was working a full-time job and also going to school to become a commercial truck driver.

We did all we could to assist him in that process including work clothes and other items he needed for his training, a costly car repair to make sure he was not restricted in getting to his job and school, gas money to ease his burden etc.

We were quite ecstatic yesterday to get the photo below which shows he got his license as we knew he was scheduled to take his road test and needed to get past that hurdle.

And he did. He will now get a great job and be very self-sufficient and we can begin working on getting Darryl into his own home and help him with furniture and home furnishings.

A tremendous achievement for him after many nights of very little sleep and days spent going from work to school.

Congrats Darryl!



PHILLIP:

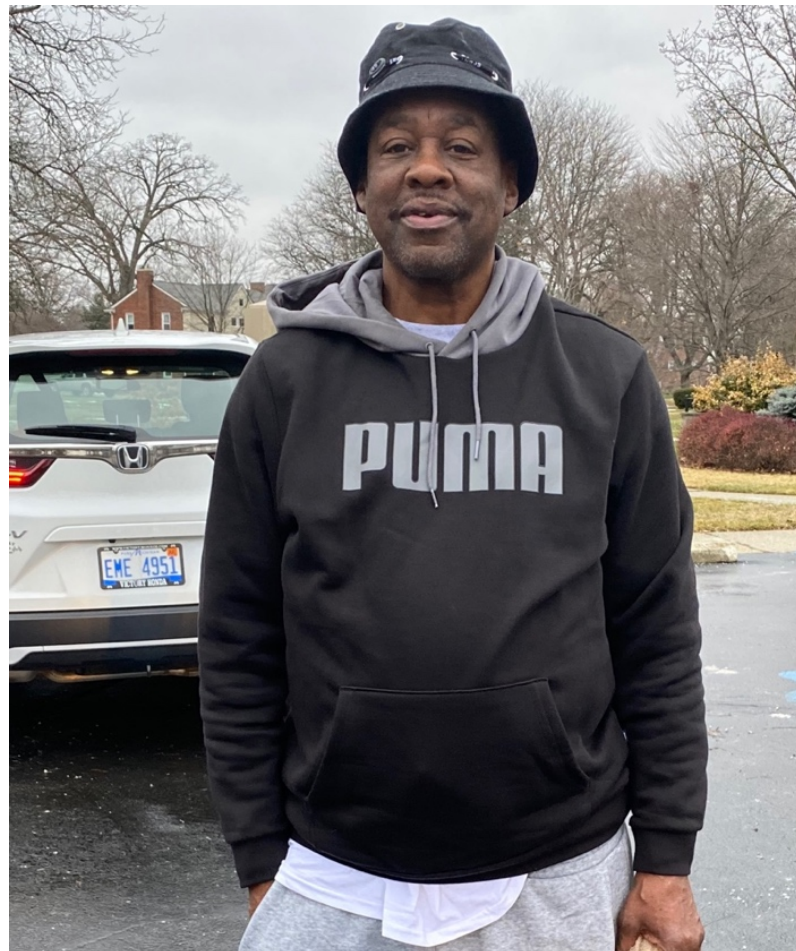
Sometimes it's not the big-ticket item, like needing a car to get to work, that's the problem. A big hurdle for some can be as basic as paying \$25.00 to take a written driver's test to get their license.

That seemingly minor assistance can be the difference between success and failure. Get the license, get the job, save money, get into a place you can afford rent etc.

But for those who return from prison with no income, no family support etc. then needing \$25.00 may as well be a million dollars as they are both as likely of being obtained.

We met Phillip recently and helped him with basic necessities, but he was also encountering this \$25.00 hurdle. We provided him \$25.00, and this large issue was removed to get his license.

Glad we could take care of this impediment for him! Small amount to some, gigantic for Phillip.



QUIN-DALE:

When you go to prison just about the age you would be moving out of your mother's house, it's a bit of an adjustment when you return to that living situation when you are released.

Quin-Dale's mother welcomed her son back last October when he got out of prison, and he was pleased to have her assistance but now it was time to find his own place. The first time he would have a place of his own and the first time he would be living without anyone else.

Quin-Dale has been doing great since getting home as he has been employed with the City of Detroit and we've assisted him with various things along the way and are now excited to get him into his own home.

We've helped make that house a home as after assisting with the move in costs we furnished it and provide all the home furnishings.

Quin-Dale got himself a nice barbecue as shown in the photo below and after we talked with on yesterday's move in day, barbecuing was first thing on his agenda!



RYAN:

Going to prison usually equals losing all your personal possessions, including things like tools and equipment one owned for skilled employment.

Once released from prison people are literally starting over at square one without clothes, shoes, things required for a job etc.

That's where we come in as we just did for Ryan who'd gotten out of prison and found a job pretty quickly given his skills as a carpenter.

It's one thing to get a job and another to have everything you need to start the job and be successful at it.

We were able to provide all the tools and equipment that Ryan needed as we determined he would be a great worker and a solid investment of our time, effort, and money.

And he definitely proved that to be correct as he's doing great at his job and is a valued employee. All good!



DONELL:

A lot can happen in nine months, that's for sure.

Donell was released, after 20 years in prison, last August and we met him at that time where he was staying in transitional housing.

He was motivated to begin work right away and he did. He's been working at the popular Detroit restaurant of Selden Standard and doing great.

By December we helped him move into his first home by assisting with the move in costs and got him situated with lots of furniture and all the home furnishings he could use.

By March, Donell was applying to our Working Cars for Working People sub-program that provides used vehicles to those meeting the requirements.

Which Donell did and he couldn't be prouder that at 41 years of age he is the owner of his first car!

We are proud as well and we are ecstatic to see how much Donell has accomplished in just nine short months. Way to go Donell!



DAVID:

When you've been in prison for a while, there is a certain level of excitement when you get your first job after being released.

It's not just earning money but a feeling of pride and accomplishment that comes with it. Someone was willing to hire you and had faith in you and was willing to give you a second chance at things. And you are not going to disappoint them.

David is now working at a restaurant and doing very well and definitely proud of himself, as he should be.

We have helped in many ways since he got out and the next step is to get him into his own housing.

He sent the following photo the other day and sharing a picture of his workstation.

Proud and definitely should be. 🙌🙌



SEAN:

Every prisoner has some choice on how they will spend their time. There are those who pursue education, or job training, or become involved in their religion. Others may become introspective and write a book about their situation.

Sean spent eight years in prison and was recently released. While in prison he wrote a book entitled “Dear Self” which he says is “A look in the mirror as I face myself as my worst enemy and most challenging obstacle. This process helped liberate me from the prison walls around my own mind.”

We met Sean within a day of his getting out of prison and he already has things in motion with the completion of another book as well as beginning a job as a mentor at a juvenile facility.

Sean was most interested in lending his time to our program as he’s very inclined to give back and make up for the lost opportunities while he was in prison.

Big things are expected from Sean who is very bright and motivated!



DARRELL:

Getting out of prison is obviously a wonderful feeling but second to that is leaving a transitional housing building if that's where one is placed after release.

Living with lots of people and sharing a small room with someone etc. does provide incentive to get a job and get out of that environment.

We met Darrell a few months ago at the transitional housing building where he was living. We helped him get a job and he began saving his money with a strong desire to get out of there ASAP.

And he has. He's been doing great at work and we were just able to help with his move in costs.

He's moving into his new home on May 1st and we'll be there to provide all the new furniture he needs and dishes, drinking glasses, silverware, pots and pans, pillows, pillowcases, sheets, mattress pad, blanket, and towels/washcloths.

That'll be a very happy day for Darrell, to say the least. And for us, as it's always exciting and gratifying to see someone in his position.



JEREMY:

The photo below looks like it was made for a “We Build Detroit” ad!

That’s Jeremy. A fine example of how pursuing an apprenticeship is a great career path for returning citizens as it provides greater job security, higher income, health care and other benefits etc.

Jeremy has been in a carpentry apprenticeship since he was released and he was doing great until his reliable car became very unreliable and as he said, “It’s become the bane of my existence.”

Car repair costs have been eating away at his savings and he finally reached out to us for help on what will be the last thing his vehicle needs for a while.

The car is back on the road and running well again and Jeremy need not be concerned about getting to and from work and can keep his great job performance going strong!



HAROLD:

We love it when someone we started with the moment they came back from prison, takes advantage of all we can offer and slowly but surely gets to the point that they qualify for our used vehicle program.

We met Harold back in 2021 and began assisting him at that time. He's been doing well and working for Bridgewater Interiors (manufacture automotive seating systems) and picking up overtime as well. He's stayed current on his rent since he moved a year ago.

Harold carpools with co-workers but that is not always reliable and becomes an issue when others don't pick up the overtime shifts that Harold chooses to work.

He applied to our Working Cars for Working People sub-program and qualified for our assistance in getting a used vehicle.

All of which was just accomplished, and Harold is the proud owner of a new Lincoln Continental!



TONY:

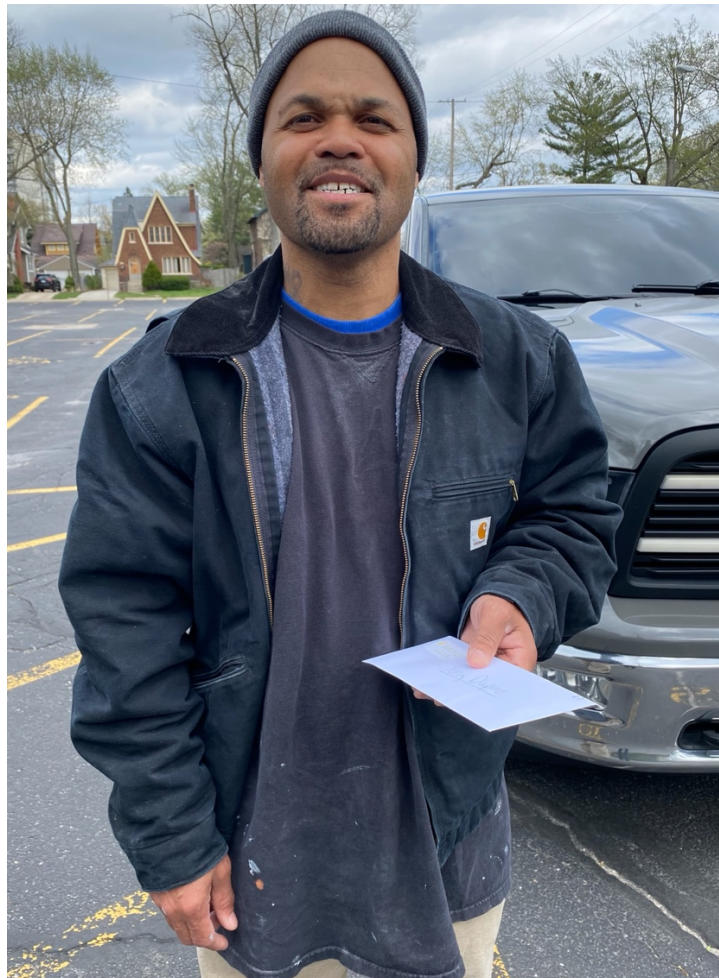
Survival.

That's pretty much the initial goal of many returning citizens who come back from prison with no family support and have to start earning money immediately if they are going to survive.

It is very helpful where some people have certain work-related skills that become critical in quickly getting a must have job.

Tony has skills in home improvement and repairs and was able to get a job right away and has been working 12-hour days at a seven day a week pace. Obviously, quite a hard worker.

After having helped with clothing and other basic necessities, we will get him into his own housing shortly. And he'll keep working hard and we'll keep working hard in moving him forward on his path of success.



DONNELL:

Sometimes prison sentences are short enough that personal relationships can be maintained, on the outside, and any business started before prison can be continued.

Donnell spent a year in prison and when he got out he was able to quickly obtain a well-paying construction job while he pursued the continuation of his own business called Everlasting Preservation. His company does property preservation including maintaining foreclosed homes for the financial institution now owning the house.

He was also able to maintain his relationship with his girlfriend and we are assisting them getting into their own home. We have helped Donnell in many ways with work clothes, basic necessities as well as getting his car repaired.

Donnell is very bright and definitely has his goals in place and working on achieving them.



JAMERO:

Every problem has a solution.

The restaurant industry is struggling to obtain employees and the solution is returning citizens who are a great resource and have been provided jobs as a chef, food prep worker, dishwasher, baker, waiting tables, bus person etc.

From high end restaurants to fast food places, we've been able to assist many people coming back from prison who obtained a job with a restaurant. We've then provided work clothes, transportation assistance etc.

Jamero got a nice job with "The Morrie" restaurant in Royal Oak and has been doing great there as a cook and is a valued employee.

The job has been good for him in many ways, but he aspires to pursue a career in welding or as an electrician.

When he's ready for that we can help him achieve that goal and we are certain he'll be successful given his strong worth ethic and intelligence.

