

## When Society Starts (Returnee)

I think the perception is that when you're released, that's when reentry starts. But that's not really true. Because the day they release you, that's when society starts. And this out here, society, that never stops.

So, reentry should start like a year out. At least. Because you need to have things in place the day they release you: bills need to be paid, deposits; you have to eat; you have to stay somewhere. The reason why we have such a high recidivism rate is because we don't invest in people not coming back. We invest in people coming back. In any kind of capitalism, you need product, you need goods. And, unfortunately, in this case, the goods, the product, is human life.

It was very difficult to really set myself up for success when I got out, because it's only one or two prisons out of more than 50 in the state that have any resources at all to help. So, it is definitely a challenge, getting out with no safety net.

I seen so many guys come back, sometimes over a weekend. I had a friend from a rural county over in the mountains. And the first couple of times he came back, I asked what was the problem? Cause when he was in prison, he worked out, ate good, but he would get out and then be back, sometimes in the same week. And he was, like, "It's nothing out there to do but drugs. I get out, don't have nowhere to go, and the people I need to stay with are drug addicts." You see it a lot. Instead of having somewhere you can be safe, the only place you really have to go is an unsafe or high-risk place, so a lot of guys keep coming back in prison.

Some guys was homeless. One guy I knew was in a Motel 6. He had a job and was doing good for the first three months, but he said every day he went outside, he saw what put him inside. First thing he seen at the motel was crack dealers here and weed smell there. And then he had a bad day and when he came home to the motel, he did one hit and it spiraled.

Housing is so important. I think it's probably the most important, especially if you don't have family. But even if you don't have family, I think we can all have a form of shelter. You know? Just some kind of shelter, some structure, because the more we invest in people, the more we thrive as a society. So why not see how many productive citizens we can have? I just don't think incarceration

is the answer to all our questions. And housing is definitely something that we can do. This is America, right?