

DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

Along with the great stories of success are some very interesting stories of transitioning back to society for a lot of people this month who are being released from prison after many, many years away.

Their adjustment is always a bit harder than others who haven't been away as long but all these individuals are doing pretty well right now as we work with them on their adjustment and help them to the point of self-sufficiency.

These individuals include:

Romallis and Tarrance – a joint story and a combined 70 years away in prison.

Ricardo – 41 years away

Ronald – 44 years away

John – 48 years away

Please enjoy their stories and all the other stories this month!

ROMALLIS and TARRANCE:

In the accompanying photo, you are seeing a combined 70 years of prison time as served by Tarrance and Romallis and both having some very unique circumstances.

Romallis was sentenced at 17 years of age to life in prison. 33 years later he was finally released, the other day, for time served as the law changed and those like him are being re-sentenced. Since he's not on parole, he can't take advantage of some of the support provided to parolees so we are doubling down in doing all we can to help him.

He said to us: "The whole world is new to me as I am just learning the phone etc. I'm very thankful and just want to stand on my own two feet as an adult now. I never had to have the chance to experience life as an adult and I truly need your help."

We are helping him in many, many ways including help with all his immediate needs (including a bed) and getting him into a Commercial Driver License training program.

Tarrance just got out of prison when his sentence was overturned after he'd served 37 years. He said after all that time away "The doors of prison were open, and I was simply told to go home. After almost 40 years away that is all I was provided!"

He's living with his brother and wife and working for their landscaping company. Tarrance and Romallis are friends from prison, and we are going to help them both as much as possible with their big adjustment from so many years in prison.



SHEILA:

Addiction is obviously very powerful and often leads to desperate criminal behavior to “feed” that addiction.

We see a lot of returning citizens who served their prison term as a result of having been addicted to something and all of which resulted in their committing a crime.

Sheila told us: “I am just really looking for help to get on my feet, I am in a very new area, and I only know two people here, and I don't want to be a burden to anyone. A lot of bridges got burned during my addiction and this time I want to do things the right way, so I am reaching out for help.”

And we are here to provide that help and just met with Sheila after she'd been out of prison for only a few weeks. But she has already started a full-time job cutting hair and we are helping her in many ways including general clothing and work clothes, home furnishings (she's renting a room from a friend), tools and equipment she needs for her hair cutting job etc.

Sheila is on a good path and the job is critical to her success so it's great she was able to get that so quickly. She's also working towards getting her cosmetology license and we also be helping find a home of her own to rent. Much great stuff in her future!



ANDREKA:

The issue of housing is a critical one for returning citizens who often find themselves living couch to couch at times as they struggle for stability and self-sufficiency.

We can definitely get people on that path with securing their employment and then helping them find a place to live. Most importantly, steering them away from the vast majority of apartment buildings which have a policy in place of not renting to anyone with a criminal background. They often tell the opposite to someone applying and wind up taking their application fee with no intention of approving them as a tenant.

We began working with Andreka a month ago and helped with work clothes and other basic necessities and she is doing good with a job she loves at Warren Screw Product and getting 50 hours a week.

Before seeking our assistance with housing, she experienced the repetitive denials from apartment buildings. We're now helping her connect with landlords who own homes and are more than willing to rent to those with whom we are helping.

So, we will get Andreka into her own place very soon and get her fully situated with furniture etc. after providing help with her move in costs. Much continued success lies ahead for her!



CEDRIC:

Winston Churchill once said that “Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”

And that is very true with returning citizens as a good attitude is critical in achieving success.

We just met Cedric and he has a terrific attitude after being home just two weeks now after spending 30 years in prison. Everything is positive to him. He has great perspective given where he came from.

He’s currently living with a friend and looking for a job and with a very good possibility coming up from an interview today. The job would be working very near his current home, and he is very excited about that prospect and earning money and getting to the point of self-sufficiency.

He is a religious man and extoled that “God is good.”

We helped with gift cards to meet his current needs and look forward to helping him with work clothes once he is hired for a job and then getting him into his own home.

He’s very appreciative of everything we can do now and in the future and we remain very optimistic that his great attitude will continue to help him successfully move forward.



CODY:

There's definitely a direct relationship between the number of questions we are asked at our initial meeting with a new returning citizen and their ultimate success in becoming a productive and self-sufficient member of their community.

The questions asked are usually about how they find a job, transportation to work, obtaining housing and furniture, get tools/equipment for their job, how to get skilled trade training etc.

When we met Cody he asked a lot of questions, which we always enjoy hearing and answering. There are a lot of things that returning citizens have never done before when they are released from prison including finding a place to live and signing a lease etc.

Cody is currently working and ready to move into a place of his own. In addition to assisting him first with clothing etc., we are now helping him find a place to live along with providing him furniture and home furnishings.

Our goal is to make sure Cody will eventually have no more questions as we'll have helped him meet all his needs and he will be completely self-sufficient.

And all that will occur very soon.



RODNEY:

We often get the following question when we meet someone for the first time as returning citizens are just not used to anyone being in their corner and simply helping them:

“Why are you doing this?”

That question comes our way at least ten times a week as it did just yesterday from Rodney, a bright and articulate individual who has accomplished a lot in his short time home.

He just obtained his Commercial Driver’s License and during the time of his schooling we did all we could as without income he needed help with clothing, toiletries, food, gas to get to class etc.

There is no great answer to his question, and we usually respond with: “Because it’s important, we enjoy it, and because we can.”

Bottom line is no matter what we say, the returning citizen genuinely indicates their appreciation for what we do. And since their success is our success, we appreciate the efforts of those like Rodney who work hard and have a plan in place and continuously say, “There is no way I am going back to prison.”

We’re also there to make sure that never happens. Rodney has done so much good already, we look forward to his ongoing success.



DEMETRIUS:

There is the popular saying of: “If you love your job then you’ll never work a day in your life.”

Indeed, if you love your work it feels more like a choice than a burden and fills your soul rather than depleting it. We do find that returning citizens are usually enthusiastic about their jobs as they enjoy the aspect of being able to do something, get positive feedback for their efforts, and receive a livable wage.

Demetrius is completing his certification for a Commercial Driver License, and he could not be more enthusiastic about his training. We always ask everyone how they like their job, or their training and Demetrius wins for the most enthusiasm and excitement displayed in answering that question. It was very nice to see and hear!

And that makes us excited for him. We are helping him obtain basic necessities during this time frame when he has no income while in training. We will next assist him find a trucking related job and getting Demetrius into his own home etc.

We will look forward to seeing his enthusiasm for his eventual truck driving job. Great and exciting times lay ahead!



DENNIS:

Sometimes, it's not a smooth path for returning citizens as some do struggle to reach the point of self-sufficiency.

Often times the difference between success and struggling is a job that provides consistent hours, decent pay, no transportation issues, and a good employer.

We began working with Dennis last February when he was just released from prison. We helped him with gift cards so he could get things like clothes, toiletries, food etc.

About a month later Dennis began working with Dana Containers and has remained with them since that time as he enjoys working there and is a valued employee.

He progressed very nicely with our program and this summer qualified for our help with his move in costs to his new home, along with new furniture and all the home goods he needed.

The next step was getting him into his own vehicle as he qualified for our Working Cars for Working People program. Just yesterday Dennis was able to obtain a nice vehicle and was very appreciative of all that we had been able to help him with.

His stable job with Dana Container is a big part of his success along with his strong work ethic. Way to go Dennis!



TIVIE:

It's definitely easier if a returning citizen has a particular skill when they are sentenced to prison as when they get out, obtaining a good job usually happens quite quickly.

As it was for Tivie who, before going to prison, was skilled in Computer Numerical Control (CNC, the programming of machine tools through use of computer software). That allowed him to not only teach the skill of CNC to other prisoners through classes while at prison but now that Tivie is a returning citizen he was able to get a good paying CNC related job with Guhring Incorporated.

Things are quickly falling into place for Tivie as he begins his job today and we helped him with clothing, toiletries, work clothing etc. He'll rapidly progress to gaining our assistance with housing and we'll help him with his move in costs, new furniture, home items etc.

Right thereafter he will qualify for our Working Cars for Working People program which will help him in his commute to Novi for work.

Tivie is doing well and it's great that he had that CNC skill in place coming out of prison as that has helped make his path much smoother.



GREGORY

Our being present for returning citizens from the time they leave prison, and at all times, thereafter, really means a lot to those we help and we've heard it over and over again that our assistance helps people "do the right thing."

Which is exactly what Gregory said to us the other day as we'd been helping him in a variety of ways since he came home, and he was working full time for his brother's demolition company. He's now beginning a second job, with Amazon, to be able to save more money and he's obviously working very hard.

And we're working hard to make his path to success much easier as we just helped Gregory get into the first home of his own and furnished it for him. Shortly thereafter we were able to assist him with a used vehicle to allow him to get to both his jobs without relying on others or the inconsistent bus system.

He said, "Thank you so much as this means a tremendous amount to me and those like me. You make it possible for us to continue to do the right thing so once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

Our pleasure Gregory!



LAMAR:

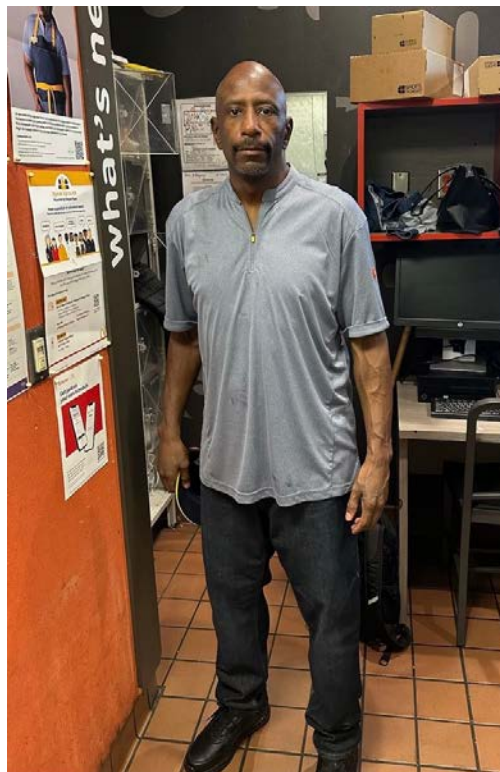
When you have been to prison for a long while and you've got to "survive" when you get out, well you often take the first job that comes your way.

And, thankfully, the fast-food is a very, very good felon friendly employment environment.

We've previously posted about returning citizens who are working at Taco Bell, Burger King, Chili's, Buffalo Wild Wings, KFC and Arby's etc. Also, McDonald's has been generous in employing those we work with and including Lamar who got a job there shortly after he got out of prison and he's enjoying things and doing well.

He's getting a solid 40 hours a week and is now, also, applying to get his CDL (Commercial Driver License) and is finishing up his one remaining GED test to get his degree.

We are helping him in various ways and one last shout out to fast food restaurants for being willing to give people a second chance. And many of those we work with who are employed in that industry, really enjoy their job and are very valued employees.



SHANQUANETA:

Thank the heavens for grandmothers who step up to the plate when needed!

When Shanquaneta was sentenced to two years in prison, her mother stepped right in to take her four grandchildren, all under the age of ten, into her home.

And when Shanquaneta was recently released from prison her mother provided her daughter a home to move into (across the street from her) and assist Shanquaneta to gradually take on all her responsibility in raising her children again.

Shanquaneta is doing all she can to readjust to being back with her family and resuming the role of mother and provider. She is determined to get a job quickly and has applied with many felony friendly places like Amazon and Dakkota Integrated Systems.

We look forward to big things from her as she's hit the ground running. Everything focuses on her children. We're assisting in various ways, including helping with the comfort of her children with beds etc. and much success lies ahead for Shanquaneta.



MONTEZ:

Although a bit longer read, this one is definitely worth the time as it is such a wonderful feel-good story.

Perseverance is often the key to success and that is clearly applicable to the amazing story of Montez.

He was sentenced up to 45 years in prison for his actions as a 17-year-old. After persevering for 32 years in prison he was finally released on April 4th, and we met him a few days later.

He was in transitional housing and was interested in getting his Commercial Driver License. Shortly thereafter he began a job and then enrolled at Suburban Trucking to get his CDL. Subsequently, it was just too many hours to keep working and go to school full time, so he devoted himself to his training and we helped in many, many ways to keep him afloat without an income. He passed his written test, and everything was going smoothly.

And then things got dicey. The last thing to accomplish is the driver's test. And unfortunately, Montez would come very close to passing each time but would miss out.

But he persevered and we never wavered in our ongoing support as we helped him with everything from food to gasoline to hotel costs to phone bills to the fees associated with taking the test etc. Failure was not an option and Montez persevered time after time after time.

He eventually passed the maneuvers portion of the test but didn't pass one driving/parking aspect and had to redo that portion. Finally, just the other day he passed. He was a licensed commercial truck driver! Woo hoo! He immediately texted us of the great news and early the next morning he followed up with:

“Man, good 👍👏👏 morning, Bob. You and your organization are so greatly appreciated for your ongoing contributions to my success. I was in a lot of tight jams, and you came through for me time and time again, when my own family left me to fend on my own. I now have a job and I am humble, and I acknowledge 🙏✨🙏 the fact that my success has everything to do with your contributions and unwavering support. You are LOVED and APPRECIATED!! I wish you the best 🙏👍👏 and I hope to make you proud by doing the right thing.”

You are very welcome Montez, and we are very excited for you. You have made us very proud. Montez already has a CDL job which pays very well. There's nothing but great things and open road ahead for him.



RONALD:

At 82 years of age, Ronald is one of the oldest returning citizens we have helped, with over half his life being spent in prison (44-year sentence).

But before he wound up contacting us earlier this week, he'd accomplished a lot as he applied for and began receiving Social Security and he located senior housing with a reduced rate of rent.

We met for the first time this past Tuesday and by Thursday he was all moved into his new apartment after we helped him with a full-sized mattress, box spring and frame and a nightstand and lamp and large couch and a dining room table and chairs.

We met again on Thursday, after the furniture was delivered, so we could provide Ronald with sheets, pillows, blanket, mattress cover, pillows, drinking glasses, silverware, pots and pans and dishes.

He has now moved into his new residence and the apartment is fully furnished and equipped with everything he needs. There is no concern for him to acquire anything else. He can rest easy and it's quite amazing all that's been accomplished for Ronald over these past few months and after 44 years in prison!



HASSAN:

A stepping stone is what we do to help us move towards a specific goal.

And that is no different with returning citizens who may often take the first job available to them, out of necessity, as at that time they have no income, no ability to purchase food, gas or a bus pass etc.

When Hassan got out of prison he quickly took at a job at the local car wash, making a low wage of \$14 per hour. But he needed a job in a hurry and that was available.

He's a hard worker and was doing great at the job but he knew he needed a higher paying job, to get to his goal of self-sufficiency, and was continuously putting in applications elsewhere.

That's now paid off as Hassan secured a job at felony friendly Amazon and starts next week.

We helped him with his current basic necessities and his work clothes he needed for his upcoming Amazon job. Soon we can assist him getting into his own housing and provide furniture and home furnishings.

Stepping stones are a great thing and all the more so when those steps lead to a much better job. Hassan persevered and got the better job and the future is looking very, very good!



JOHN:

48 years. That's how long John spent in prison after being sentenced to life for his actions as a 16-year-old. Thankfully, the law changed, and it was unconstitutional to sentence juveniles to mandatory life without the possibility of parole.

That didn't mean all those juvenile lifers were released from prison, but they could obtain re-sentencing and in the case of John that just happened last week, and he was re-sentenced to 40-60 years and was allowed to leave prison due to time already served.

He's now 64 years old and trying to readjust with all that time away.

We are doing all we can to make that transition be as smooth as possible and we helped with his obtaining basic necessities, provided great job leads that meet his abilities (and he should be working soon) and our help gave him hope of a good future on the outside.

It's obviously a huge adjustment for someone like John, sentenced as a 17-year-old and having spent about 75% of his life in prison. But he's optimistic for a good future, as are we, and we will remain beside him the whole way!



VINCENT:

It's always exciting for us to have been helping someone since the moment they got out of prison and be beside them as they reach milestone after milestone and culminating in reaching self-sufficiency. And then being able to receive a used vehicle from us, which makes their life incredibly easier.

We first met Vincent in September of 2022, about a week after he returned from prison. He was then able to get a job at Dakkota Integrated Systems, where he's now worked for over 13 months.

We assisted him in getting into his own housing this summer via connecting him with a wonderful landlord who is always willing to rent to returning citizens. Vincent recently applied to our Working Cars for Working People program as he'd been relying on the bus but after he moved it was much more difficult. He gets off at 3am and a lot of time was spent waiting for busses or he'd walk a long way home if the bus never arrived, sometimes not getting home until two hours later. He was also going to school on the weekends to get his CDL which he recently obtained!

He met our requirements, and yesterday we were able to get him into a 2016 Chevy Equinox. Vincent couldn't be more happy and grateful. A wonderful success story!



ANDRE:

We work with a lot of returning citizens who work a tremendous number of hours per week at their job, but Andre definitely takes that to a new level. At times he works 12-hour days and seven days a week.

So, it is always our pleasure to help those like Andre who are working as hard as possible to be successful and self-sufficient.

We began assisting Andre back in September and helped him with basic necessities at that time and then quickly helped him with move in costs along with furniture and home furnishings.

Then it was on to assisting him with a vehicle as his application to us for a used vehicle included the following: "Currently I spend \$50-\$80 to get to work each day. Around \$350 or more each week. Uber is killing my pockets that's why I need help. My job as a quality inspector is great. I love it and I work 12 hours a day and often 84 hours a week. I'm at peace honestly but a vehicle will put me in a position to save more money each month. I'm spending \$1200+ to get to work every month and that's crazy. All that money can be saved for car repairs & insurance. Thanks, as always, for your consideration."

We just helped Andre with a great Buick vehicle and thumbs up indeed Andre! All good and glad we could assist. Well deserved.



DEREK:

It's amazing to see how much some returning citizens can accomplish in a short period of time.

That includes Derek who we first met about seven weeks ago. At that time, he was living with a family member and had been, even after eight years away in prison, able to resume the job he had prior to incarceration with Boat Keepers of Saint Clair Shores. Derek was also very determined to get his own housing and a vehicle.

And he did with our help. We just assisted him with his move in costs to his new home that he is renting and a few days later we were able to assist him with a great 2014 Ford Focus.

He is doing great, loves his job, earning good money and now completely self-sufficient. We've enjoyed assisting him in this process and similarly pleased with how much he was able to accomplish so quickly. He's determined and a hard worker and both those traits got him to where he is in a relatively short period of time.

Kudos to Derick!



MARK:

Another big day for a “Daily Double!” We were able to help Mark move into his new home by assisting him with his move in costs and providing him new furniture and home furniture. But adding to the excitement was his qualifying for assistance with a used vehicle to assist him in getting to and from his job etc.

Mark was able to get a great 2015 Chrysler vehicle for a very nice price in purchasing it from his cousin.

We began working with Mark the end of September and he was clearly a very bright individual with plans in place to get his Commercial Driver License this winter and at that time, just recently out of prison, he had connected with an old friend to work with his landscaping company.

He subsequently obtained a higher paying job working in a school bus maintenance department and able to get a consistent 40 hours a week.

Things have quickly fallen into place for Mark over the last few months and he’s doing great and still moving forward on his other plans of getting his CDL and then starting his own business.

Much success lies ahead for him!



BOBBY:

After being away in prison for over 32 years, Bobby's goal was to start working right away and stay busy.

Thankfully he was able to quickly get a job with Capital Sales Distribution Company and he's been doing very well there, and he is also looking to pick up a second job at night.

One of the biggest problems for those coming back from prison after a long time away is the challenge of new technology. They've never used a computer, let alone a cell phone, and filling out an application online is initially quite difficult.

You would think that the basic rudimentary skills of technology would be taught before one is released from prison but that's not the case.

We do our best to guide people like Bobby through our online application and ultimately everyone is able to complete it and start the wheels in motion for our ongoing help.

Bobby is bright and determined and he's picking up on the new technology. We've helped him with his basic necessities and currently assisting him with a car repair. Housing is the next goal, which should occur soon, and every day is a step forward on his path to self-sufficiency.



RICARDO:

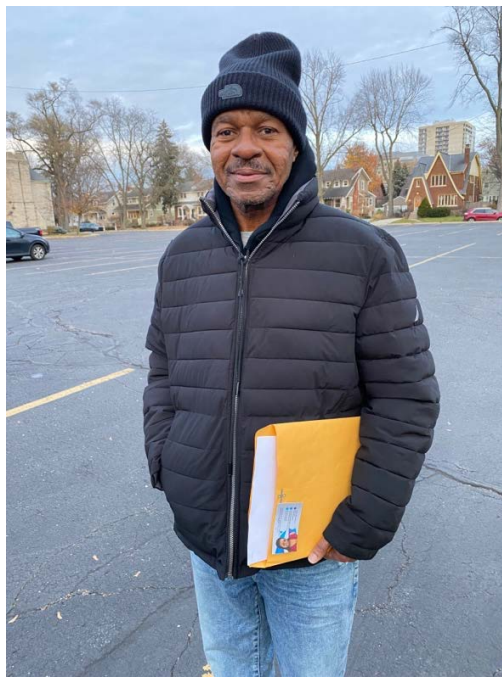
After a whopping 41 years in prison, Ricardo was just released on parole the other day.

So much in the world has changed since he was sentenced in 1982 and there is obviously a tremendous adjustment. But Ricardo is very bright and was a model citizen in prison. He developed great skills as writer and editor and is working with University of Michigan to enroll in their paralegal training program.

His housing situation is not good at present as he's sleeping on a couch in an unheated basement, and we are working on getting him into his own housing ASAP and help him with furniture and home furnishings and a computer for school.

It is definitely a "one step at a time" approach to things at present as his ongoing adjustment, after over four decades away from society, is a steady process. All things considered; he's been progressing nicely over the last week as we met him after he had been released for only six days.

We were impressed by him and will do all we can to help Ricardo and we anticipate great accomplishments him as he is moving steadily forward on his path of success and with many plans already in place.



BREANA/HOME FURNISHINGS:

We view the return from prison as a second opportunity at life and new beginnings and thus when we assist people with clothing, furniture, home furnishings etc. we want to provide them brand new items at all times.

We started working with Breana in June and she was able to get a good job as a behavioral technician with Open Door Living Association working with autistic children.

She was living with her daughter at a family member's home and, like nearly all those we work with, wanted to get into a place of her own as soon as possible.

That was recently accomplished, and we assisted with brand new furniture and appliances for Breana and her 13-year-old daughter, along with all the home furnishings they would need. The latter always includes, as shown in the accompanying photo, brand new pots and pans, dishes, drinking glasses, silverware, sheets, pillows and pillowcases, mattress cover, blanket and towels and washcloths.

Everything to make their new house feel like a home. Breana and her daughter are very excited to finally have their own house together and the future looks great!



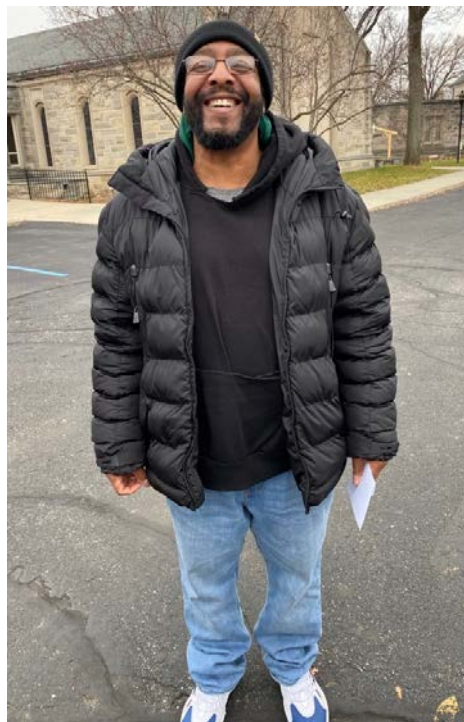
LEO:

One of our greatest joys is helping someone get a job. In our initial application and when we meet in person, we seek to determine the person's areas of interest and we then do all we can to connect them with a job opportunity.

It's always a wonderful feeling when we get a text, as Leo sent: "Thanks for the list of jobs you provided. Those were great and I just got an offer from Metropolitan Detroit Area Hospital Services. I start next week and couldn't be more excited. This job is perfect, and I won't let you down! Thanks so much once again!"

Very exciting times and we just met Leo again, to provide him with assistance in his obtaining all the work clothes he needs for the new job. Having employment opens the door for so many opportunities of assistance from our program including our finding a someone a home to rent, assisting with move in costs, providing new furniture and home furnishings etc.

After 27 years in prison, there are much brighter days ahead for Leo. Exciting times! Congratulations Leo.



IVORY:

One never knows how the connections they make may ultimately be of great benefit in the long run, but Ivory certainly recognizes how that occurred with him.

We first met Ivory at the end of May as he had just been released from prison. He was able to secure a job pretty quickly through a staffing agency and was doing well with his job, but staffing jobs lack job security, and we encouraged him to seek jobs where he would be a direct hire. He eventually obtained a job with Faygo and we helped him with his move in costs to his home and furniture and home furnishings.

But he wasn't at Faygo very long as, out of the blue, he received a job offer from Firsthand (an organization that helps those with mental illness and drug addictions). Ivory had connected with those operating Firsthand from all the volunteer work that he does as he gives back to his community.

He starts his new job shortly and it's everything he wanted and a wonderful opportunity. We helped him with obtaining work clothing needed for his new job and we are very excited for Ivory who has always been determined, generous in helping others, and very appreciative of all we have done for him. All good!



SABRINA:

Only about 7% of all truck drivers are female. But we do see a good number of female returning citizens who do pursue getting their Commercial Driver's License and obtain a career as a truck driver.

Including Sabrina, who got out of prison a few weeks ago and is pursuing her CDL as she had already taken course work in prison and passed the written test. Now she's enrolled in trucking school for the hands-on driving training and will soon be able to take the road test.

Having been gone for ten years, there is a lot she is navigating, and she recognizes her need for assistance, as she texted us: "I need help, there's no other way to put it. I cannot do this on my own. Thank you for being there."

We have helped her with casual clothing and work clothing and helped with her car insurance and car repair as she definitely needs a working vehicle to get to and from school. Without any income at the present time, all those things we helped with were major obstacles for Sabrina. She had no other resource but us for assistance.

Glad to help.



LONNIE:

It is always uplifting to see the support that returning citizens often receive from family members. From providing a place to live in their home and feeding them etc., to driving them around to job interviews and other appointments.

We have also seen their generosity in providing the returning citizen a used vehicle and usually at an incredibly reduced price to help out as best they can.

We met Lonnie back in April of 2022 and began assisting him at that time. Since then, we've helped with work and casual clothing, car repairs, gasoline gift cards, furniture, rent, food and now with a car purchase as his relative was willing to sell him a vehicle at a real bargain of a price.

Lonnie really needed a vehicle to get to and from his job at Henry Ford Hospital at the Subway restaurant located at the Hospital. Transportation is so critical to returning citizens and thankfully his family member was willing to cut Lonnie a great deal and we were able to assist him with that cost.

Lonnie was very appreciative. He's someone we've always enjoyed helping. Lonnie's close to the point of self-sufficiency now and sometimes people take longer than others in getting to that point for a variety of reasons but good to see him now arriving at that destination.

