

Greetings Success Stories Program Alumni

Last year’s ending and this year’s beginning are a reminder that it is not about beginnings or endings – it’s about moving forward as we learn from the past and stay present. There’s no denying that 2021 left everyone adjusting. COVID changed the way we live on the inside and out. It hasn’t been easy, but the greatest growth has happened throughout the toughest times.

The Success Stories coaches ended 2021 remembering the not-so-distant memories of living within prison walls. This remembrance brought fire to our purpose and dedication to what we do.

PROGRAMMING UPDATES

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Our partnerships have continued to grow and relationships have evolved into collaborations with organizations like **Homeboy Industries**, **Thoughtful Human**, and **Young Women’s Freedom Center**, who played a vital role in making our curriculum effectively relatable in multi-gender and non-binary spaces.

Our partnership with **Clothes The Deal** has helped our alumni to walk out in fitted, name brand suits. One of our latest collaborations has been with **Nancy Haffar & Associates**, **FNM Mortgage**, and **Generational Legacy Solutions LLC**, who have volunteered their time and shared their knowledge in helping to make our dreams of owning a home a reality.

Good things are ahead and it’s all dedicated to making sure we all have the resources we deserve.

RECOMMENDED READING

Abolition. Feminism. Now. by Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie

An Abolitionist’s Handbook: 12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World by Patrisse Khan-Cullors



Left: Eddie Suer at a recent *Clothes the Deal* event, where alumni were given these perfect suits.

Below (from left to right, top to bottom row): Graham Finocchio, Roy Duran Jr., Micheal Lopez, Dee Soy, Jacob Farias, Hugo Gonzalez, Eddie Suer, Jesse Santos, and young Hugo Gonzalez take a group photo outside of the *Clothes the Deal* office.



YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Our Alumni Network has been designed **for you and by you**, to continue building the communities we create during the 12-weeks of Success Stories Program.

If there are particular topics you’re interested in reading about here, works you’d like to contribute, or other recommendations – please write to us at: 1175 East Baker Street E-19, Costa Mesa, California 92626

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE TO US AT:

Success Stories Program 1175 East Baker Street E-19 Costa Mesa, California 92626

WELCOME HOME

ROBERT LOPEZ



After serving over half of his life in prison, **Robert Lopez** stands as a free man. He's 38 years old now and looking back in amazement at the ups and downs that have brought him to where he is today. No longer does he wait in blues, wondering while watching time fly and questioning the day that freedom would come. Raised in South Gate, Robert was arrested and tried as an adult at the age of 16.

Robert was sentenced as an adult to life in prison. Twenty-two years have passed and his smile is still bright. When asked what his greatest experience was while in prison, he confidently responded, "Success Stories empowered me by giving me the space to recognize what was and is most important." With this empowering attitude he became one of the first leaders of our program. "Before Success Stories, I was stuck in my old ways. I never really did any self-help groups. I realized that I began to build true friendships and real family once I decided to have authentic conversations. One of my greatest moments of growth was being able to co-create a curriculum that helps others in bettering themselves in a relatable

way." When asked what he would say to all those that he grew up with, who are still incarcerated, he lovingly expressed, "never give up hope, find what is most important in your life and then fight for it!"

There's no doubt that Robert will continue to play a vital role in Success Stories Program. We welcome him with open arms and open hearts, recognizing that it takes a whole village in this lifelong process to be who you were meant to be.

ALUMNI RESOURCES

Our partners at Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles offer an assortment of resources for folks returning home, including:

- tattoo removal
- workforce development
- solar panel training
- education services
- mental health services
- domestic violence
- legal services
- case management
- substance abuse

If you've recently come home or will be soon, check them out at <https://homeboyindustries.org/> and follow them on social media for event updates and sign-up information: @homeboyindustries

FOR YOU, BY YOU

We are looking for written submissions to include in future publications of our newsletter. These can be personal narratives, poetry, creative writing – anything you're willing to share! By submitting your work, you are consenting to it being included in future newsletters. Please send any written works, ideally 350 words or less, to our team located at:

1175 East Baker Street E-19
Costa Mesa, California 92626

MEET THE TEAM

CHANTAL COUDOUX



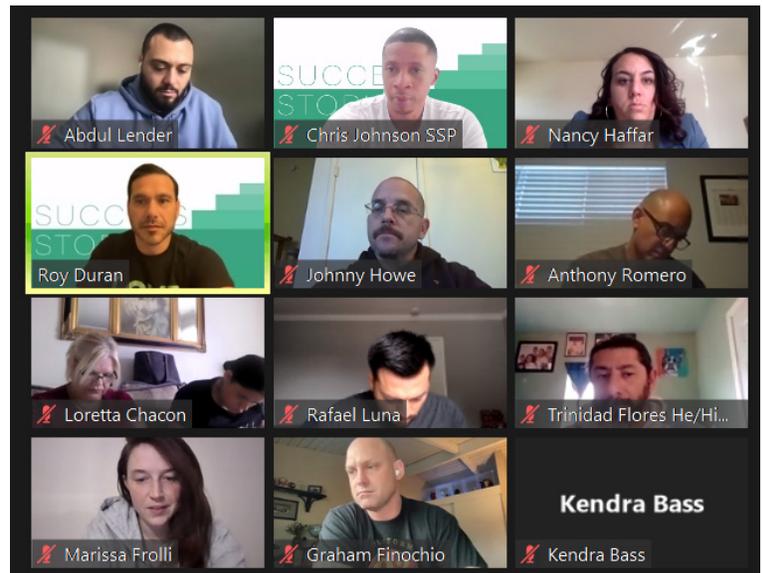
Chantal Coudoux is the incredible Co-Executive Director and Director of Operations at Success Stories Program. Hailing from Washington D.C., Chantal attended Scripps College, a women’s college in southern California, where she became involved in social justice movements and action. Not so long after, she met Richie Reseda, Co-Founder of Success Stories Program, who was later arrested for multiple robberies and was facing over a hundred years in prison. This was the first time that Chantal was personally impacted by the criminal justice and carceral system. “It doesn’t work,” Chantal stated when referring to prisons and punishment as a means to change harmful behavior, which would lead her to working more collaboratively with the Success Stories team from inside CTF in 2014.

Chantal’s abolitionist beliefs grew as her relationship with Richie became stronger. Chantal was the first investor in the work of

Success Stories Program. She volunteered her time and became the key resource to the team’s success. When asked what motivates her Chantal lovingly declared, “my team.” Family is more than a blood relative; family are those that have your top 5 in mind. There is no doubt that Chantal is our family. Thanks to her, Success Stories Program was able to grow into the official nonprofit organization that it is today; expanding programming, supporting alumni, and providing staff with a livable wage, including top notch healthcare benefits. We wouldn’t be the success that we are without Chantal. Thank you for everything that you do!

EVENTS

Last month, thanks to the team from *Generational Legacy Solutions*, we hosted a Home Financing Workshop to provide alumni and their loved ones with information to help bring their home ownership goals to fruition. Alumni and loved ones are welcome to join us for future events! Stay up to date by checking our website: successtoriesprogram.org/events



HELP US STAY CONNECTED TO YOU

Help our team keep our records up to date. If any of your contact information changes, you can mail this back to us or email kiki@successtoriesprogram.org

Name:

Phone:

Email address:

ACTUALIZING OUR TOP 5

MANNIE BUYS A HOME

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE

Submission from Victor Munguia



Where in life do you fall into BROKE THINKING?

This is a question that makes me wonder and process my thoughts. If I start to think of all the work I need to do to change my life, then my broke thinking will activate with thoughts of laziness – that’s too much work, fear – I’m good, I’ll take the easy way out, etc. All these distorted beliefs will cloud my mind. I also intend to fall into broke thinking when a “homie” shows me the so-called “homie love.” I’m going to share an experience I had in 2019. I had been working on my transformation already. A homie came up to me and asked me, “Victor, I know you’re a Christian, but I need you to back me on this riot.” In that moment, I had a choice – “loyalty” or say “no,” but because of my belief, I immediately said “I got you.” In that moment everything went out the door: my plans, recovery, family, freedom, God, etc. I got that instant gratification of acceptance, of “the homie love.” However, now that I’ve taken Success Stories, it has expanded my mind and has helped me apply rich thinking. I know now that by me making a broke thinking decision, it can cost me my top 5. I now process and think of my decision and replace them with positive ones. I also keep in mind where I want to be in life. Success Stories showed me I don’t need acceptance from no one, and I can say “no.” I need to be aware of negative influences and keep them at a distance. I now will challenge my broke thinking and beliefs and process the cost and pay offs. I know for a fact broke thinking will not be worth it. Every choice I make will be for a long-term future to become better. From now on I won’t let fear make me fall into broke thinking.

Last year, **Mannie Thomas III**, Success Stories Program’s Co-Executive Director and Director of Programming, moved into his first home with his family, after returning from prison just over two years before. It wasn’t long ago that he sat in prison serving a life sentence as he wrote “owning a home” on his top 5 list. In addition to crossing this goal off his top list, Mannie also recently received the news that he has been discharged from parole. This amazing accomplishment is a real reason to believe that anything is possible!