

Greetings Success Stories Program Alumni

We're more than half way through 2022 and Success Stories Program continues to experience growth as we share our program with more people and work to prove its effectiveness as an alternative to punishment and incarceration.

PROGRAMMING UPDATES

BECOMING EVIDENCE BASED

As we move towards becoming an evidence based program, we recently completed our first research session at Homeboy Industries, where fourteen individuals graduated into the Alumni Program. With the help of researchers Hannah, Christina, and Lindsay, we're gaining the data we need to demonstrate the effectiveness of Success Stories Program as an alternative to prisons and expand to work in new institutions and schools across the country.

ALUMNI HEALING CIRCLE



The biweekly Alumni Healing Circles have provided a space for sharing our most vulnerable truths and challenges. Open minds come together as coaches work collectively with alumni to discover the best ways to remove obstacles and create paths that alleviate suffering and deepen our capacity to heal together.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



Please join us in welcoming Tyrell Lee to the team in freedom! After returning home a few weeks ago, Tyrell joins our team as a Transformational Coach.

He's been a facilitator of the program since January of 2019 and was introduced to the group via Hugo, Chris, and 88. In 2018, Tyrell's sentence was commuted by Governor Jerry Brown. Tyrell is passionate about using his "mess" as a "message" in an attempt to help youth avoid the pipeline to incarceration.

We're also excited to announce another addition to the team, our new Development Associate, Marissa Commey.



Marissa learned about the work being done at Success Stories Program while attending a music festival in 2018. It was at this moment that the seeds of abolition were planted in her life. Later while working at a prison, she saw that "mass incarceration" was far more than a concept and was heartbroken when seeing the ways in which lives were being disposed. After reading Mariame Kaba's *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*, she decided to root herself in an abolitionist ethic and is thrilled to be doing so through serving the mission of Success Stories!

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE TO US AT:

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

WELCOME HOME

ARTURO ROMERO



Arturo Romero was born in Fresno and was raised in Paso Robles, California. Sentenced to 10 years for discharging a firearm, he's a Success Stories Alumni that has truly committed to what's most important to him. He remembers growing up on Section 8 housing with his parents who were physically not home as they worked to make ends meet. His reflection of his past experiences brings clarity to how a lack of resources can interfere with the connection that's needed between parents and a child. "I think that they might have invested too much time into working and not being present," Art said.

I've known Art for several years now. It's in Soledad where I noticed his artistic skills that were unmatched by anyone else. Recognizing that art has been a form of liberation for myself, I can't deny Art and I share a passion that for a long time felt like a hobby that would never really amount to much...until now.

Now a father of a daughter and a newborn son, Art was released not so long ago. With the goals of being present for his family, he ventured out into the free world. It wasn't easy for him and he didn't expect it to be. "Success Stories helped me organize my

goals and plans," he stated, and he was left with putting the plan into action. "I purchased a tattoo machine and began to tattoo individuals from home after work hours." Soon his tattoo work began to be recognized and Art decided to take the plunge, clutching onto his folder of all his prison artwork that he created throughout his years incarcerated. With determination, he walked through the doors of tattoo shops in hopes to begin an apprenticeship as a professional tattoo artist. He humbled himself and became willing to learn instead of maintaining the attitude of "I know."

Finally, he was given the amazing opportunity to begin his apprenticeship and immediately jumped into the groove of what he was meant to do. "Making something out of nothing" has led Art into making his dreams a reality. He's making more than enough money to not only provide for his family, but enjoy life with them as well. A long list of clientele reminds him of how far he's come, but also reminds him that the journey isn't over.

Art, like myself, grew up in prison, in every sense of the word. It's these experiences that have allowed him to express himself in such a vivid way. It's all in the detail and he makes sure to bring it in all that he does. When I asked him if he has any advice for the Alumni inside and out he said, "state your goals, progress one step at a time without skipping, don't overwhelm yourself, never shy away from asking for help, recognize and use your support network, and stay true to what's most important to you". Art Romero is mastering the art of being himself while being true to who and what is most important to him. I'm proud to say that another Success Story has been added to the book.

CALLING ALL ARTISTS!

We're inviting all program alumni to help us design a new Success Stories Program logo.

Please submit your designs to:

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

A \$200 prize will be awarded to the artist whose design is chosen! Please submit designs by September 1st. The winner will be announced in the next issue of the newsletter.

MEET THE TEAM

KIKI REITANO



Kiki Retano plays a vital role as Success Stories' Communications and Administrative Coordinator. She breathes life and action to every word, thought, and idea in the Success Stories movement. She strongly lives her life with the perspective that, "love heals all." Her dedication in loving people brings her to serve those that aren't always remembered and at times are discarded.

From San Mateo California, Kiki is an abolitionist that recognizes that the punitive punishment isn't designed to support healthy changes. Kiki witnessed her uncle going in and out of prison and while many held onto the perspective that her uncle deserved the consequences he received, her grandma left a strong impression on Kiki, always emphasizing that "love heals all." Thanks to her grandmother's loving approach, Kiki now carries the torch. Representing her

uncle along with every human being that has experienced or is experiencing the same. She stands firm and hopeful next to everyone who has felt discarded by society.

"The misfortune is that, it's so normalized to grow up in a traumatizing environment that we don't even factor it into the reason why people make the choices they make," she says. Her understanding rings true as Kiki states, "We've all made mistakes and even with that, we still deserve love, care and the opportunity to take accountability and improve ourselves."

When asked what she would say the Success Stories alumni on the inside and out Kiki loving said, "Hope is a discipline, stay hopeful and I can't wait for the day that we can all have like a big barbecue and be together."

Kiki will be stepping away from Success Stories to pursue a bachelor's degree, but will always support the efforts of Success Stories Program to offer an alternative to incarceration that empowers people to be the greatest and truest versions of themselves.

BECOME A CONTRIBUTOR

We are looking for written submissions (350 words or less) 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 to our team at:

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

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@successstoriesprogram.org

Name:

Phone:

Email address:

MORE UPDATES FROM THE TEAM



PANEL AT UC IRVINE

“Sharing a platform with our formerly incarcerated family at UC Irvine has helped me realize how far we have come. Individuals no longer feel that their past experiences with incarceration should be hidden. The journey continues as individuals that once walked in blues now walk into success.” - Hugo Gonzalez

We had the pleasure of joining Underground Scholars at UC Irvine for a screening and panel discussion with some of our alumni. It was great to have a chance to meet and talk with students at UCI about the work we’re doing at Success Stories Program!

RETREAT · REFLECT · REGENERATE



Our team finally had a chance to be together in-person for the first time for our staff retreat! It was a powerful opportunity for us to reflect on and appreciate

the accomplishments and growth we’ve experienced over the last two years and look ahead at what’s next for our team! Big shout out to Haewon for leading us through our workshop and to Hannah for grounding us with a breathwork meditation during this time together!

RETURNING TO IN-PERSON PROGRAMMING

By Hugo Gonzalez

I was a teenager when I was sent to the California adult prison system. I used to fantasize about freedom. Being sentenced to serve multiple life sentences had a way of making me believe and feel that the “free world” was so unattainable. Governor Davis reminded me that the only way I would be released was in a pinebox. I pledged to myself that I would never put myself in a position where I have to return to prison if my fantasies of freedom ever came true.

I was released a little over 4 years ago and I am no longer on parole. I’m living on my own with my 21 year old son, who I’m still getting to know. As I think back to the many experiences that I had while I was incarcerated, I remember so vividly believing that my fantasies would never come true, but they did.

I certainly didn’t think that I would ever voluntarily go back into the desert that held me captive, but I am. As I drive beside the Salton Sea on my way to Calipatria State Prison I can’t help, but to ask myself, “why am I doing this? Why am I taking these long drives into extreme heat and dryness? Why am I placing myself in a position where I’m returning to prison?”

The truth is: prison is where my freedom began. I didn’t realize it at the time, but it was where I started to value myself and dream the impossible. The dream of freedom.

I walk into the C-yard and remember the structure as if it was yesterday, I observe the participants walk in and I’m reminded of why I make the long drive. Success is the accomplishment of an aim or purpose. I found my purpose and I’m aiming with confidence towards success in continuing the movement of playing a role in setting human beings free from within and out.

Much Love Fam!!!