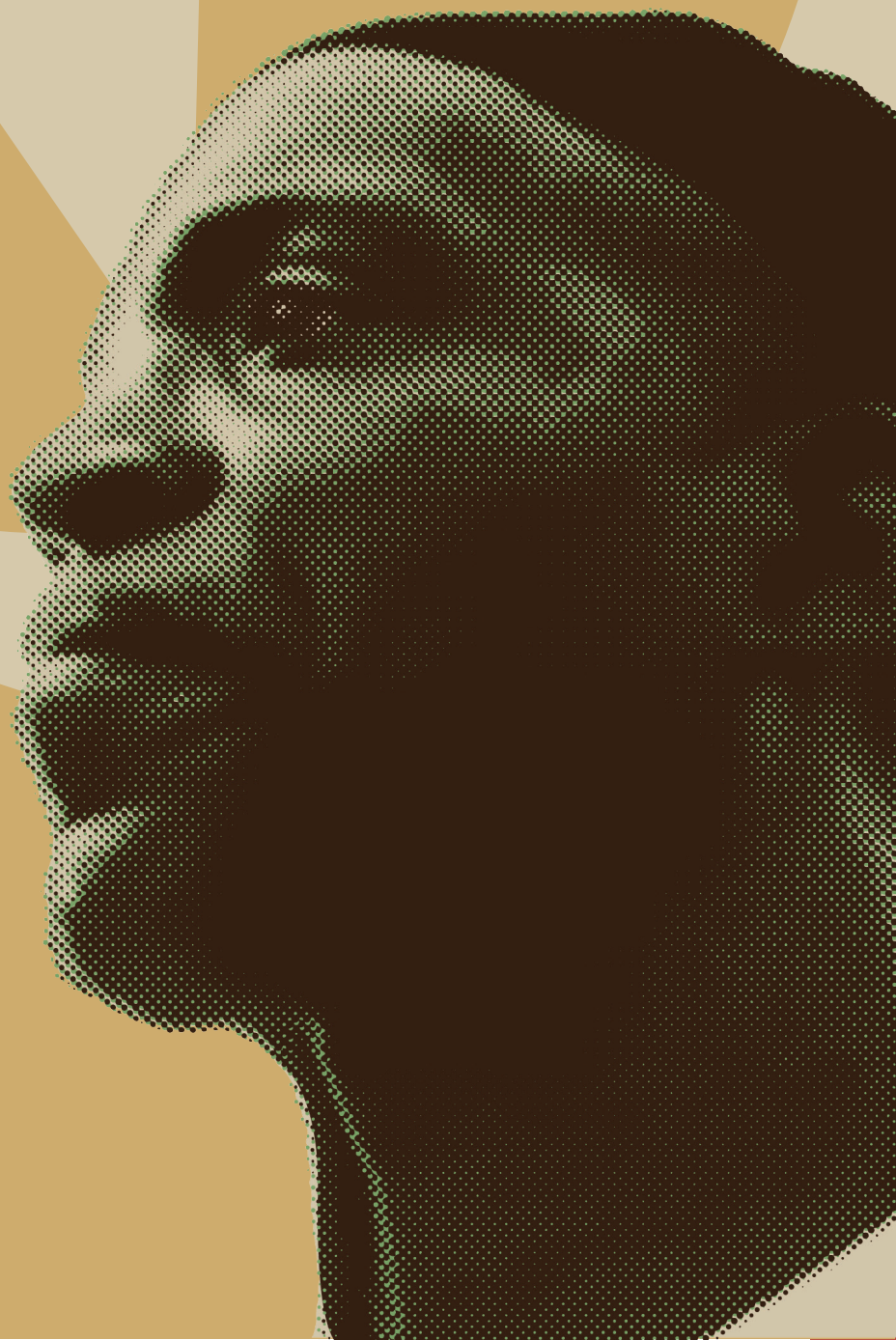



THE HONEST STRUGGLE

DISCUSSION GUIDE





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

HOUSING

How can chaplains support returning citizens around housing? Based on the film, what are some best practices?

Programs for returning citizens are especially effective when partnering with religious organizations, as organized religion provides a framework of practices which emphasize consistency and discipline (prayer, meditation, self-reflection). The film demonstrates that these practices can work very well to create structure for people as they re-enter a world where such behaviors are really left up to individual choice and willpower. Chaplains can help and recommend returning citizens for housing and employment with a letter of support.

Religious leaders who work with such populations should be humble in their approach, using everyday language to create connections between concepts in the scriptures to real-life experiences. For maximum depth and weight, ideally the spiritual leader will have personal experience with incarceration. Creating unrealistic moral and/or spiritual ideals are not helpful.

What are Sadiq's qualities that positioned him as a "perfect fit?"

Sadiq was a perfect fit ultimately because he was willing to change. He was tired of doing the same things which landed him in prison repeatedly. Willingness is a funny thing. There are many people who say they want to change, who truly believe they want to do better, and yet it takes a certain level of internal brokenness to physically follow these claims with action. Doing the right thing, even when no one is looking, is a learning curve for a lot of us. Behaviors like lying, cheating, stealing, manipulating others, assault -- or whatever lands people in jail-- can often become second nature for many people. While a change in surroundings, such as from jail to a transitional home, can happen fairly easily, knee-jerk reactions to violence or crime can take a many years to move beyond. You can't think your way into better actions, you have to act your way into better thinking. Sadiq was "perfect" because he was ready to do something different.

The film shows a solitary dog running through the winter streets of Chicago. What does the dog represent to you?

I loved this part of the film. First, I was just moved by the beauty of the cinematography and how the dog blended in and caught your eye at the same time. I guess the metaphor for me would be something like keep moving & stay under the radar or maybe lone wolf. Life can be lonely, but it can also be beautiful.

Have you ever felt like the dog in the film? Why or why not? --Yes. I've realized for myself, the basic root of most of my struggles are just basic biological instincts for survival which somehow or another got way out of whack. Evolutionary assets like fight or flight have the power to wind up doing me far more harm than good. I have to remain vigorously aware of this tendency in myself and keep the instincts in check.

PRISON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

What barriers do formerly incarcerated people face in the job market?

With most jobs, a criminal record automatically puts your application beneath any applicants who don't have a record. Aside from charges which could cause a degree of alarm for employers, returning citizens also tend to have large gaps in work history on their resumes. Additionally,

What are the greatest strengths and assets returning citizens offer upon reentry?

Many returning citizens want to work. Humbled by their experience in prison and eager to stay on a straight path, they will work hard (often harder than other workers with clean records) to make up for lost time. They want to prove to themselves and their communities that they can be productive members of society.

How can communities and organizations support and uplift returning citizens' job prospects?

There are some obvious things: organizations which offer resume & cover letter workshops, assistance with online job search & application, interview training (especially on how to answer the tough questions surrounding the criminal background check), and free access to printers/ printing & other computer equipment. Additionally, some returning may need training in new technologies and internet communications. Aside from this, communities can also push for policy changes regarding hiring practices and criminal background checks, or work together to fund and create new organizations which specifically hire ex-offenders.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

During incarceration, how do prisoners' family relationships change?

While incarceration affects everybody differently, on the surface it removes the prisoner from the everyday life of the family unit. Some families need to scramble to make up for lost income or support that was provided by the prisoner while they were home. For other families, it can be a relief. I once heard a mother say, *"at least if she's in jail, I know she's safe... and I can finally get some sleep."* In any case, there will always be a degree of pain and stress for everybody involved. Further, organizing visits, phone time, and contact with the inmate is a tedious and frustrating process. Upon release, workshop training is needed for returning citizens for helping the formerly incarcerated to maintain and facilitate personal and family relationships.

During incarceration, how do prisoners' relationships with their home communities change?

Prisons remove prisoners from their homes and communities, keeping them in a highly controlled environmental bubble. Jail eliminates most (if not all) of the choices available to people in their home communities. While the routine of the bubble might be good for establishing a level of "normalcy" and obedience in the institution, once

prisoners return home, the severe contrast of an unpredictable outside world makes it difficult to practice the same institutionalized principles and patterns which became simple to follow 'on the inside,' under conditions of strict guidance and limited options. Experts suggest curriculum should be implemented within one year of being released; which includes relationship building and de-escalation skills.

After release from prison, should returning citizens return to their families and/or home communities? Why or why not?

A successful rehabilitation program of any kind should be able to reasonably assume that a returning citizen can intuitively handle the same situations (people, places, and triggers) that would have pushed them to criminal activity before. This is a pretty idealistic statement, so perhaps a period of time re-adjusting to freedom and living in the world is a more appropriate plan. But no one should ever be made to feel like they can't go home. An assessment should be taken on how external sustainability will be established before release; such as relevant job skills, opportunities, as well as community and familial support.

HEALTHCARE: TRAUMA

How can healthcare access impact a returning citizen's livelihood?

Many returning citizens have physical and mental health problems which can affect their

employability. Adequate health care coverage and a logical after-care plan for addressing these issues (whether they be medical or psychological) is crucial to setting a person up for success.

How are traumas stored and manifested within the human mind and body? Spirit and soul?

Trauma is stored in the human mind, body, and spirit in ways that affect each individual differently. In my experience, emotional pain has been a great motivator. If people are given a safe space to work through trauma, they can change. It may be more difficult for some than for others, but when the stakes are high enough and compassion is available, healing can happen.

Who does policing impact the most? How are policing practices connected with trauma?

[Men of color](#) are impacted most by police policies and practices. [Racial biases](#) against black and brown-skinned men have been culturally ingrained in Americans for generations. Added to this, most law enforcement officials don't receive formal education around the laws which they are trying to uphold and protect. They are trained mainly in physical combat and arrest procedure. Advocates of police reform have advocated for a more comprehensive training in law, conflict de-escalation, and cultural competency.

It is the recommendation of many organizations, including IMAN in Chicago that returning citizens should volunteer and become involved with community organizing, for their unique perspective and personal stories could help reshape discriminating policies, laws, and more.

How is poverty related to trauma and mental health?

Poverty is a form of trauma. When a human being's basic needs for food, shelter, and emotional stability aren't met, it is easier for other poverty-related forms of societal dysfunction (violence, crime, alcoholism and drug abuse) to take hold.

HEALTHCARE: SUBSTANCE USE

What are some challenges that can trigger substance use relapse?

Feelings of powerlessness- the internal condition of an addict/alcoholic is a constant disease. Drugs and alcohol provide a momentary respite, a sense of ease and comfort, and at least for a period of time, can make the addict feel like they are gaining control (even though to the outside world, they are not.)

Loneliness- solid human connections with others through things like friendship, service, or even a shared moment of politeness can help recovering addicts maintain their sobriety. Isolation in a

moment of restlessness, irritability, or discontent is gravely dangerous.

Environments with normalized drug use are also not conducive to recovery.

How do we provide treatment for returning citizens and prevent substance use?

Who serves and provides care?—Aside from doctors who are needed to take care of the physical medical detox, other addicts in recovery are the ideal candidates for walking newly clean returning citizens through the life adjustment of staying straight. Many addicts have an idea that you don't understand them unless you've been through what they've been through. They will be more willing to listen to/take direction from someone who has walked their walk. Helping newcomers is a great way for long-term recovered addicts to feel useful, while keeping sober and remember where they came from.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

What roles can religious communities serve for returning citizens?

Religious communities often provide support for returning citizens. Those providing reentry services may be motivated by their faith to engage in the work, and those who seeking those services may be looking for a supportive religious community. In the Christian and Islamic traditions, stories of redemption are central to spirituality, and a returning citizen may cast their own story in a similar light. Interfacing with other people of faith helps to strengthen one's belief that one can change, and that we are not necessarily beholden to our past.

How is Sadiq's journey similar to Malcolm X's?

Malcolm X's personal story of redemption from prison is the archetype for many similar stories. The Autobiography of Malcolm X has played an important role in the conversion of thousands of incarcerated individuals to Islam. Just as Malcolm X found a new way of life coming out of prison, so too did Sadiq seek a community that believed in his redemption. In The Autobiography, Malcolm sheds his older identity of "Detroit Red" just as Sadiq sought to bury "Danny Boy."

How can Muslim communities, centers, and mosques facilitate matchmaking for returning citizens seeking marriage?

What are the benefits of intergenerational fellowship among returning citizens?

In the Muslim tradition, what are some positive anecdotes on Believers in prison?

A paradigmatic story in the Qur'an is the narrative of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) being held in prison in Egypt on false charges. He becomes an exemplar of patience who waits until the right time to be exonerated for a crime that he did not commit. While in prison, he benefits those around him, making the most of his situation.

The famous scholar Ibn Hanbal was jailed by the caliphs of his time for his refusal to accept their theological viewpoints. His steadfastness eventually led to his release, and was a critical moment in Islamic history involving the separation of mosque and state.

A direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad named Musa al-Kadhim spent much of his life in prison. Even though he was unjustly jailed by the rulers of his time, simply because he represented a threat to their authority, he continued to preach a message of spiritual purification and to lead a campaign calling for justice as best he could. Due to

his unwillingness to bend, he was eventually martyred in prison, in an attempt to silence him. But his legacy lives on in the Shi'i community which honors him as the 7th chosen successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Another direct descendent of prophetic heritage, Hassan Al-Askari, also spent the majority of his life in prison and under house arrest by the ruler of the time. Shi'i Muslims acknowledge him as the 11th successor of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the father of the final one, Imam Mahdi. even under house arrest, prison guards periodically took him to Baghdad, questioned him, and put him in prison there. In his short life, he endured great suffering. Yet despite the oppression he faced, he is still in the hearts of the Muslims and his grave is visited every year by millions.

POST-RELEASE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS

After release from prison, what temptations do returning citizens face?

The greatest difficult Sadiq faced was returning to a life of crime, because that is what was he did before entering prison. He speaks about walking down the block and people seeing "Danny Boy" even though that is not who he is anymore. Opportunities are made available to him by people who knew him before, and he has to find the proper way to decline their offers of assistance. This mirrors the struggles of many. In addition, many returning citizens might still face the threat of violence from former enemies, and struggle with the repercussions of what could happen if they don't defend themselves.

How can returning citizens build networks to support a successful transition?

Meaningful relationships with believing Muslims were a cornerstone of Sadiq's transition. These bonds can be made in mosques but must be nourished outside of formal worship spaces. Finding other individuals in transition who share a desire to serve is a good method to having a positive transition.

How can chaplains, non-profit organizations, agencies, and faith-based communities best support returning citizens in their reentry?

IMAN helps to build these networks by hosting informal breakfast gatherings at a local restaurant for returning citizens in their community. Organizations like IMAN become an important meeting place for returning citizens for socialization as well as worship and community service. Additionally, the culture of IMAN creates a welcoming environment for those in transition and encourages other community members to assist the reentry population with socially, spiritually, and financially.

Based on Sadiq's successful re-entry, how can prisoners prepare themselves for success upon release?

Sadiq prepared himself for success by making meaningful change in his behavior and associations with others. Additionally, he took on a position of leadership within the Muslim community in organizing and educating the community. These skills were transferable to his transition on the outside in working with IMAN.

How can Muslim communities better serve believers in prison?

Muslim communities should all have direct contact with one or more prison chaplains in their area in order to provide assistance to men and women coming home as well as providing resources to the prison community. Strengthening organizations like Tayba Foundation, 2nd Chance Books, and Link Outside are important in offering resources to incarcerated Muslims. Additionally, individuals can offer their time and expertise by writing prisoners and even visiting to teach seminars or have additional prayer services.

MAIN THEMES OF SADIQ'S TRANSITION

HOUSING

"We're very selective about the brothers that we brought into the home. In Sadiq's situation, a chaplain in fact reached-out to us who had heard about the fact that we have some housing opportunity. So, about a month before his release, we scheduled an interview. The chaplain was extraordinarily impressed by Sadiq's energy, by his leadership skill. All of us felt like he was a perfect fit. He was a musician, and just clearly had a level of passion and energy on the phone that inspired us."

-Rami Nashashibi (3:47 - 4:18)

"In a couple of weeks, I'll be starting on a construction job and rebuilding one of the houses just a couple of blocks away. I think this will afford me an opportunity to get my life back together, like having a fresh start."

-Sadiq Davis (6:18 - 7:12) Green ReEntry: construction scene

"Green ReEntry is now what we're calling these homes... the Green ReEntry Leadership Homes. Green retrofit homes with the support of brothers who are actually learning the skills while they're in the process of rehabbing the homes."

-Rami Nashashibi (6:18 - 7:12) Green ReEntry: construction scene

PRISON EDUCATION / EMPLOYMENT

"Coming out of these streets, facing the extraordinary difficulty of acquiring a job as a formerly incarcerated person, it's still an extraordinary challenge."

-Rami Nashashibi (12:16 - 12:26)

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

"First time, I had too many of the wrong people contacting me. And I couldn't deal with that. I ended up back in jail after 22 months. And I was glad to get there."

-Sadiq (13:10-13:24)

"I'm in the Green House ReEntry. I got family... but they ain't Muslims. They still drinking, they're gonna smoke some bud, they're cussing, they're talking crazy... I don't mean no disrespect to none of them but that's not who it is that I am, and not how I want to live."

-Sadiq (29:40-30:00)

"I'm going to be the first one to say, I've had the slick cars, the jewelry, the women... been there, done that. I wouldn't trade it in for nothing in the world for what I have now. (I) don't have nothing now, but I got peace of mind."

-Sadiq (9:48-10:07)

HEALTHCARE

"It was a real intense surgery, and the body has to heal from such intensity. And that means now that I can't work. I can't do construction. And she told me, this lasts for six months."

-Sadiq (13:10-13:24)

Sadiq describes a traumatic incident being profiled and detained by police in Chicago. This is an example of the negative impact and psychological consequences discriminatory policing and inner-city violence

-(52:26 - 55:00)

Healing and restoring humanity.

-5:20 - 5:30

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

Housemates recite the 103rd chapter of the Quran as they gather at the dinner table

-(37:30)

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS POST-RELEASE

"When you get help from the wrong people, and they volunteer their services, at a spur of the moment, you've got to be conscious of how you say 'yes' and who you say 'yes' to. Because a lot of times, it's not good."

-Sadiq (13:10-13:24)



CALL TO ACTION

PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Academic and vocational training play a major role in reducing recidivism and maximizing societal benefits. For every dollar invested in prison education, the United States saves four to five dollars in the first three years of re-entry.

Despite significant assets, returning citizens face substantial barriers in securing living wage employment and self-sufficiency. Part of this is systemic; about 65% of prisoners haven't earned a high school diploma, and 14% haven't advanced beyond 8th-grade.

Educational opportunities differ state-to-state and prison-to-prison. In some jurisdictions, programming is sub-contracted to community colleges or other educational institutions. In others, prisons directly facilitate programming.

Some prisons have strong programs in place, while others have substantial gaps in essential programs. In many states, prison overpopulation and budget cuts have reduced the number of in-prison education programs. Furthermore, most prisons are ill-equipped with technology. On average, those who participate in prison education programs are 40% less likely to return to prison.

The following organizations are involved in this work:

[Prison Studies Project](#)

Searchable and continually updated, the directory is an online, state-by-state listing of primarily on-site degree-granting postsecondary education programs in prisons. As a joint initiative with the [Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice](#) and currently housed at the [Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History](#), PSP aims to increase educational opportunities for people who are incarcerated in all 50 states by supporting those who run higher educational programs in prison.

[Harvard Organization for Prison Education and Reform \(HOPE\)](#)

Harvard Organization for Prison Education and Reform (HOPE) continues to tutor and teach youth, men, and women in local correctional facilities, with its volunteers engaging in prison reform advocacy.

[The Petey Greene Program](#)

The Petey Greene Program supplements education in correctional institutions by preparing volunteers, primarily college students, to provide free, quality tutoring and related programming to support the academic achievement of incarcerated people.

[The Last Mile](#)

The Last Mile (TLM) was created to provide programs that result in successful reentry and reduce recidivism. We believe that jobs are the key to breaking the cycle of incarceration. Our mission is to provide marketable skills that lead to employment. Our in and out program provides career training in prison with mentorship and job placement upon release.

[Asian Prisoner Support Committee, at San Quentin](#)

Founded in 2002, Asian Prisoner Support Committee is based in Oakland and works primarily with inmates at San Quentin and Solano state prisons and the reentry population in

Alameda County. APSC is the only organization in the nation with a mission to provide culturally competent services and support specifically for the API incarcerated and formerly incarcerated population.

[Five Keys](#)

Five Keys works to restore communities through education and programs that respond to student and community needs. Five Keys provides a range of educational programs and services including high school diploma, jail-based job centers, career and technical education, digital literacy, ESL, cognitive behavioral therapy, recovery programs, violence prevention, case management, correctional education consulting, and college and career counseling in seven California counties.

HOUSING

Housing is an essential component of a successful reentry plan. In the film, Sadiq describes the value of stable housing, *“The second time, man, I stayed out nine years, but I still never came home to a setting like this. It’s a big difference, it makes a big difference.”*

Safe housing with Muslim peers is especially valuable. Muhammad Jawad, a returning citizen at CSP-Soleil professed, *“When I get out, all I need are Muslims. I’ll kick it with 10 or 15 Muslims. That will keep me safe. Then, we need a waqf. Build housing through a waqf. That stuff really interests me.”*

The Honest Struggle illustrates a model for connecting Muslim returning citizens to housing. In the film, IMAN’s co-founder describes its program:

“The home is really just targeting brothers that have just come home. Brothers that have done a fair number of years and are looking to get themselves on their feet, have nowhere else to go, to being in a communal setting with other Muslims.”

Rami Nashashibi

Stable housing is especially important for those living with mental illness. More than 10% of returning citizens were homeless prior to their arrests. For those with mental illness, however, the figure is about twice as high. Returning citizens diagnosed with a mental illness are almost five times more likely to end up in shelters after release.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

Incarceration deeply impacts families. Moreover, released prisoners often return to families altered during and by their absence. Incarceration induces economic and emotional stress, and divorce rates are high among prisoners. Families deal with loss of income, exorbitant legal fees, as well as travel expenses to visit loved ones in prisons.

A family with an incarcerated father is nearly 40% more likely to live in poverty. For couples, income loss, combined with a lack of privacy, intimacy, and physical contact, can lead to resentment and anger, especially if they have children.

For example, at The Reset Foundation, one of the students had several young children with different mothers. Each of the women were housed in different facilities across a number of states. Chris supported each of his children, as well as his own biological mother, to the best of his means, from the inside. This induced tremendous economic and emotional stress, which was compounded by issues of perceived infidelity. The financial burden and lack of physical contact magnified his pre-existing health issues, which eventually required hospitalization. Indeed, incarceration deeply impacted every layer of his family life.

More than five million children have a parent who is or has been incarcerated. Children experience the financial stress of missing parents, as well as bullying and hardships due to social stigmas. They are also more likely to exhibit behavioral health issues, dropout of school, and endure unemployment.

On the other hand, students that had nearby family and who enjoyed consistent contact with their children experienced greater well-being. Such students had greater extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful reentry.

Returned citizens have to work through psychological traumas and the shock of reintegration, making family life especially challenging. Supports and counseling are essential for helping families through the transition.

HEALTHCARE (COUNSELING, SUBSTANCE USE, MENTAL HEALTH)

People who have served extensive time in prison may find that familiar places, people, and ways of living have disappeared completely. Simultaneously, many of the former issues and temptations remain present, which can challenge returning citizens’ health and wellness. In the film, Sadiq describes some of the temptations:

“I had somebody come to me and say, ‘listen man, I can get you all the cocaine it is that you need. You want crack, I can get you powder, all you got to do is say so, and I can have it delivered to you today.’”

-Sadiq

Muslim returning citizens need culturally-relevant counseling services, preferably from trained practitioners with a background in Islam. The incidence of mental illness is two to four times higher among people who are incarcerated than the general population, and three-quarters of those released from prison have a history of substance abuse. This further underscores the need for therapy and continued outpatient treatment.

In the film, Sadiq experiences a surgical procedure involving hernia repair. *“I had bowel obstruction. It had locked up in three different places. Due to a gunshot wound I sustained in 1980. They had to cut me open,”* says Sadiq.

-Health care: Surgery and recovery (10:15-12:00)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

Reliable religious education is crucial for Muslim inmates to improve their understanding of the immense tradition of Islam. Prison chaplains and libraries are often overworked and under resourced to support the needs of Muslim inmates. The below organizations help to address this gap in providing community and educational resources for incarcerated Muslims.

[Tayba Foundation](#)

Tayba Foundation is a non-profit organization that supports individuals and families impacted by incarceration. Through a holistic program encompassing education, life skills, and re-entry, we help our clients rediscover their inherent goodness and value as they reconnect.

A dedicated, credentialed staff works with clients on topics ranging from spirituality to entrepreneurship, building self-confidence and mitigating the possibility of future incarceration. Our approach is tailored to each client's needs and abilities. Customized learning tracts give our clients ownership of their path toward self-discovery and transformation. Tayba Foundation understands that many clients lack the relational, financial, and problem-solving acumen needed for a successful return to private life after incarceration. Working with former prisoners and a host of professionals, Tayba equips clients with the life skills they need for re-entry.

[Link Outside](#)

Link Outside is a prison outreach organization transforming the lives of incarcerated men and women across the United States. We use an innovative rehabilitation model of personalized engagement, Islamic spiritual knowledge, mentoring, and access to college-level education.

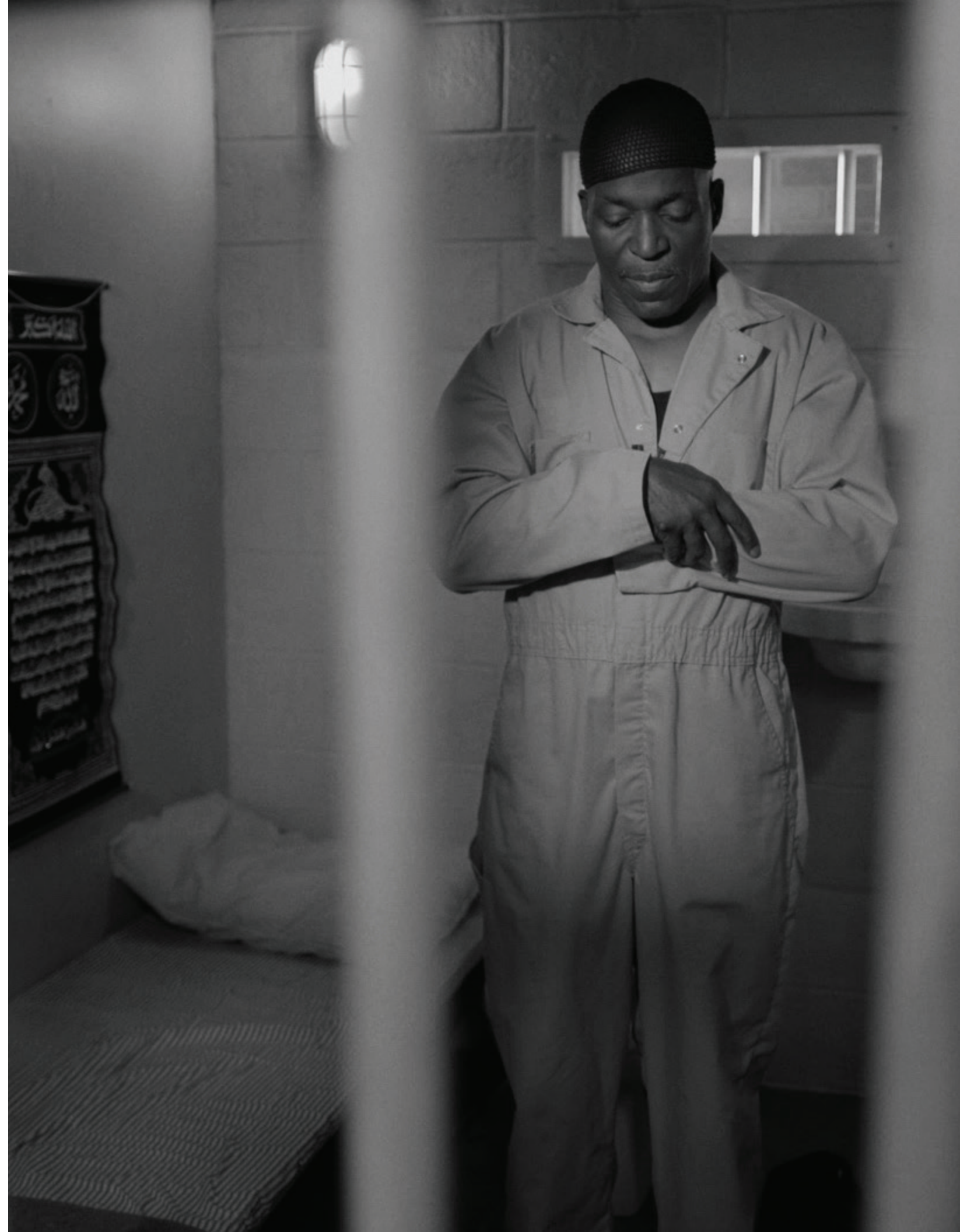
[2nd Chance Books](#)

2nd Chance Books provides free Islamic books on belief, ethics, morality, and family structure in Islam. Inmates use these books as a tool for self-development and to reform themselves and also their friends, loved ones, and communities upon release. The program purports to transform prisoners' bad habits into good ones; achieving social reform by teaching the morals and ethics of the Holy Prophet and his family; moulding leaders; producing better citizens who are active in helping their communities upon release; promoting awareness of the true teachings of Islam as taught by Prophet Muhammad (s) and his family; and remove misinformation and misconceptions about Muslims and Shia Islam.

POST-RELEASE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS

Returning straight home is not always in the best interest of a returned citizen. Relationships with spouses, children, neighbors, and peers may have changed, and families may not be prepared to support returned loved ones. Furthermore, environmental factors can trigger returned citizens to resume old habits. They may go back to unstable or unhealthy living situations. This can present serious challenges to a successful transition, which can lead to struggles with addiction, depression, and other mental health and emotional issues. Those who have been released from prison are far more likely to die of an overdose and also experience much higher suicide rates than the general population.

In response, the government, in concert with corrections agencies, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations have developed transitional support programs across the country to innovate reentry programs focusing on employment, housing, education, and health care.



Youth Advocate Programs (Multiple States)

YAP Adult Services offers Intensive Supervision Programs as a condition of probation and Re-Entry Programs as a condition of parole. Both offer intensive in-home, in-community support that both holds offenders accountable and safely meets their rehabilitative needs within the community.

Strive International - Fresh Start (Multiple States)

STRIVE Fresh Start is an innovative, comprehensive reentry program launched in 2017 with U.S. Department of Labor Funding. Incorporating evidence-based interventions such as Moral Reconciliation Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, legal services, occupational skills training, and transitional jobs into STRIVE's proven employment model, Fresh Start currently operates in six STRIVE cities: Atlanta, GA; Greenville, NC; New Orleans, LA; Philadelphia, PA; San Diego, CA; and Waterbury, CT.

IMAN's Green ReEntry (Chicago)

Green ReEntry, IMAN provides transitional housing, life skills education, and sustainable construction training for returning citizens in Chicago and Atlanta.

Project Homecoming: Detroit Re-entry House (Detroit)

[DREAM](#) has secured a site to host a transitional home to be run by [Tayba Foundation](#) for formerly incarcerated believers near the [Muslim Center](#) in Detroit.

The Osborne Association (New York)

The Osborne Association works in partnership with individuals, families, and communities to create opportunities for people affected by the criminal justice system to further develop their strengths and lead lives of responsibility and contribution. We design, implement, and advocate for solutions that prevent and reduce the damage caused by crime and incarceration.

CASES (New York)

CASES offers a range of programs to help youth and adults newly-released from jail or prison to successfully navigate the challenges of reentry, access opportunities to improve their lives (including through proven protective factors like education and housing), and avoid recidivism.

The Fortune Society (New York)

To address the complex and overlapping needs of our participants, The Fortune Society employs a holistic "one-stop shop" model of service provision, offering a comprehensive array of in-house social services to over 7,000 people with incarceration histories each year.

Anti-Recidivism Coalition (California)

ARC provides its membership with mentorship, mental health services, supportive housing, access to jobs and education, and opportunities to advocate for criminal justice reform. This comprehensive approach to reentry improves individual outcomes and increases the health and safety of communities throughout California.

Homeboy Industries (Los Angeles)

Homeboy Industries provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community. Each year over 10,000 former gang members from across Los Angeles come through Homeboy Industries' doors in an effort to make a positive change.

Prison Society (Pennsylvania)

The program helps prepare incarcerated individuals for successful re-entry mentally, emotionally, and logistically. After a series of workshops on relevant topics (such as social media, applying for medical benefits, securing housing, and obtaining education and jobs) mentees are assigned to mentors, to meet one-on-one for at least six months to develop and achieve a personalized goal plan.

Taleef Reentry

Ta'leef Collective provides direct support and financial assistance to the formerly incarcerated "coming home," and meaningfully searching for ways to rebuild their lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In addition, the following Muslim non-profits have services and initiatives supporting the reentry community: [Khalil Center](#) (Chicago, N. California, New York City), [Muslim Wellness Foundation](#) (Philadelphia), [IMAN](#) (Chicago, Atlanta), [Islah LA](#) (Los Angeles), [Sahaba Initiative](#) (San Bernardino, CA), [ILM Foundation](#) (Southern California) [Valley Ranch Islamic Center](#) (Texas)

Just as faith based communities preach the value of redemption and fellowship, reentering Muslims are living examples of those values and have transformed their lives and traversed the horrors of prison life.

Community leaders should recognize the immense importance of engaging and assisting reentering citizens, not just because reducing recidivism is good for our cities, but because men and women coming home can be powerful assets to communities.

CONCLUSION: BARRIERS TO REENTRY



Over 100 million Americans have a criminal record of some type. Even a minor record, such as a misdemeanor or an arrest without conviction, can create barriers that hinder reentry. For Muslim inmates, the barriers are often greater than the general population.

As they transition back to society, returning citizens need support with housing, education, employment, healthcare, substance use, and family relationships. Muslim returning citizens need additional supports with religious education, marriage services, and finding an inclusive Muslim community.

Returning home can cause stress and anxiety for those previously incarcerated. Even mundane matters, such as unfamiliar technology, can trigger discomfort and doubt. For example, restricted access to telephones and electronic communication decreases independence and self-reliance. Moreover, transitioning from the highly structured prison environment can feel disorienting on the outside.

Finally, probation and parole officers have heavy caseloads and need increased capacity to provide supports for Muslim returning citizens. For example, officers need connections to the already limited services offered by mosques and Islamic centers. Such linkages are essential to minimizing recidivism and implementing a successful reentry strategy.

The most successful reentry strategies start six months before release from prison. Ideally, the returning citizen drives such plans, which are heavily supported by staff. At a recent religious celebration at CSP-Soleil, an inmate described his strategy:

“I’m finishing a 30-year bid after getting locked up at 22. I’m 52 now and going home in a few weeks. I’ve completed construction trainings in prison and earned a number of certifications. I decided I want to work at a nonprofit that works on housing issues for battered women. So I connected with Delasol Street in San Francisco, where I’ll be living and building homes. I have the CEO’s number right here. I’ve never been to San Francisco, but I’m excited. I’m grateful. Alhamdulillah.”

-Husayn Elmhurst

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CONTRIBUTORS:

IMRUL MAZID

JUSTIN MASHOUF

DAVID R. COOLIDGE

UMAR HAKIM

KATELYN STOLER

SADIQ DAVIS

