

THE STRUGGLES OF

REFUGEE

A photograph of three people, two adults and one child, walking away from the viewer on a paved road. The person on the left is a woman wearing a blue dress and large hoop earrings. The person in the middle is a man in a light-colored jacket. The person on the right is a child in an orange jacket. They are walking away from the viewer towards a misty landscape. The image is framed by a grid of thick black vertical and horizontal lines, creating a stylized effect.

The United States currently holds more incarcerated people than any other country. In Massachusetts, many of their stories start in the Suffolk County Jail.



In 2022, over 6,000 people were imprisoned in Massachusetts.

People in poverty and racial minorities are more vulnerable to the incarceration system here. Their struggles typically go beyond their imprisonment.

The period after release from prison is called reentry. Many recently released prisoners have to go back to poverty stricken areas with little to no support. The stigma and trauma from being incarcerated is something that thousands of people deal with every day while reintegrating with society.



Reentry is just one of the various forms of oppression that contribute to mass incarceration and result from it. People going through the reentry process often find it difficult to find work and access support due to their record. This can cause cycles of poverty, trauma, and recidivism. Despite these struggles, thousands of people and organizations are fighting against this system and finding ways to succeed every day.

FOLKS ON PAROLE ARE CONSIDERED 2ND HAND CITIZENS



This story examines Airto's journey through education and police harassment after his release from prison.

IT'S EVERY SINGLE DAY.



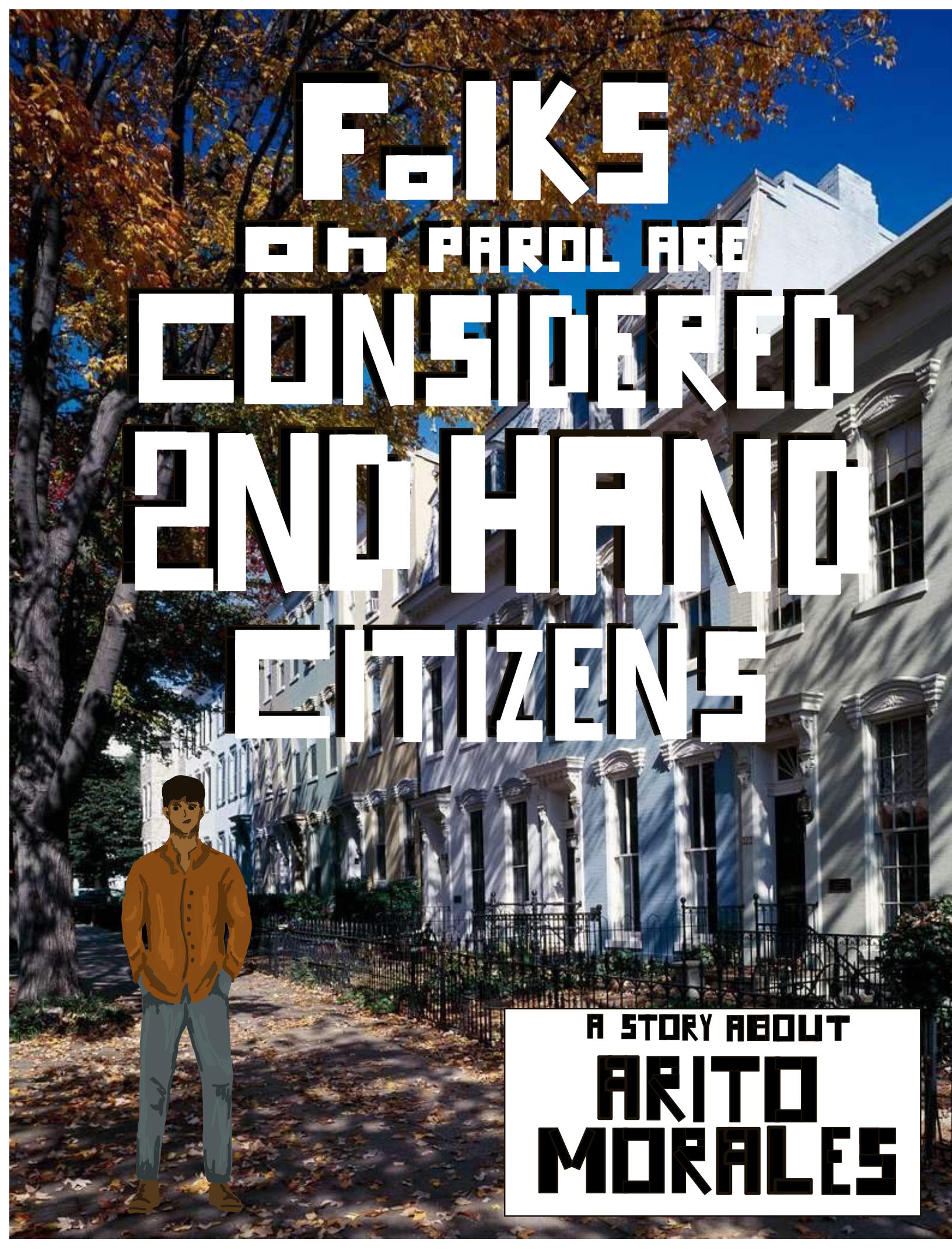
"It's Every Single Day" shows Marilyn's struggles with addiction and her journey towards helping others like her.

ROCA STORIES

Roca's mission and game plan for helping people break the cycle have positively impacted many lives.

ROCA STORIES

One of these people, Jovani, has a story of relapsing and re-understanding.



**FELIX
ON PAROL ARE
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A STORY ABOUT
**ARITO
MORALES**



Airto became acquainted with the criminal justice system before his teenage years even began. From the ages of 11 to 16, he describes constantly checking in and out of incarceration as a youth.



"Man, Morales," a juvenile counselor remarked, "you've become a veteran. You've been here... a total of 25 times."



Taking education seriously was always part of Airto's identity. His mom instilled the value of education in him as a young boy. But it became apparent quickly that his studies were at odds with the life he was living, and Airto pulled himself away from school, both physically and mentally.

At 20 years old, Airto was sentenced to 18 years, through two 9-year concurrently served sentences. He would now experience incarceration through the lens of an adult, and for a prolonged period of time.



"When you go into the prison system, it, kinda 'cooks' you, to a certain extent. I call it the 'furnace of humiliation', whereas you're kinda burning off the dross of impurities in the form of bad habits, bad characteristics, belief systems. You either allow this whole process to burn that stuff off, or you hold onto it."

This period of Airto's life brought new perspective onto his situation. His analysis of his place in the incarceration system developed.

Airto heavily studied spiritual texts. He started learning Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic. These works nourished his soul while in prison and opened another avenue of personal growth for him. He actively worked on building his spirit, and set the foundations for seeking higher education past his release. The bond between tending to one's mental state and education became crystal clear to him.

Airto acted upon his new outlook on life. He immediately set to work on his studies, and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. Settling in and re-entering society were greatly aided by Airto's new philosophy.

After nearly a decade of incarceration, it seemed that all the work Airto did was paying off.



But this journey was not without its external obstacles. While Airto had decided to reform his lifestyle, others weren't as convinced.





One day while in his home, Airto's doorbell rang, and he opened the door to dozens of officers outside. They strip searched him and opened up his garage. They asked if he had tattoos, which confused Airto. They introduced themselves as a "gang task force", to which Airto assured them that he wasn't gang related at all.



They proceeded to then ask if he was affiliated with al-Qaeda, implying that Airto was a terrorist threat. Even more confused by this question, Airto learned that the source of this was the pile of books on his desk. The officers said that they asked because they saw Arabic scripts on the pages. Airto was now aware of how twisted his situation was. "Oh, really? That's Hebrew. And if you don't know the difference between Arabic and Hebrew, you shouldn't be asking me those questions."

The police officers showed up in large numbers several more times after this incident. Every time, Airto recounts, they jeopardized his housing and re-entry back into society and his community. Suspicions by the officers were quickly revealed to be false pretenses, but they kept showing up.



Airto's legal rights felt like null and void to him. He learned not through peaceful means that people on parole are treated like second class citizens. There was still much work to be done.

A photograph of a park path in autumn. A woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a bright blue sleeveless dress and large gold hoop earrings, walks away from the viewer down a paved path. She is wearing a necklace with a small heart-shaped pendant. The path is lined with fallen leaves and leads towards a large tree with vibrant orange and red foliage. In the foreground, there's a black trash can and a wooden bench with ornate metal armrests. The background shows more trees and a person walking away in the distance.

A STORY
ABOUT
**MARILYN
JONES**

**IT'S EVERY
SINGLE DAY.**

Marilyn Jones' first encounter with the prison system came at only 14 years old. Throughout her life she had been abused by her father and his partners. Her father's girlfriend at the time decided to pick a fight with Marilyn, in order to have her removed from their home.

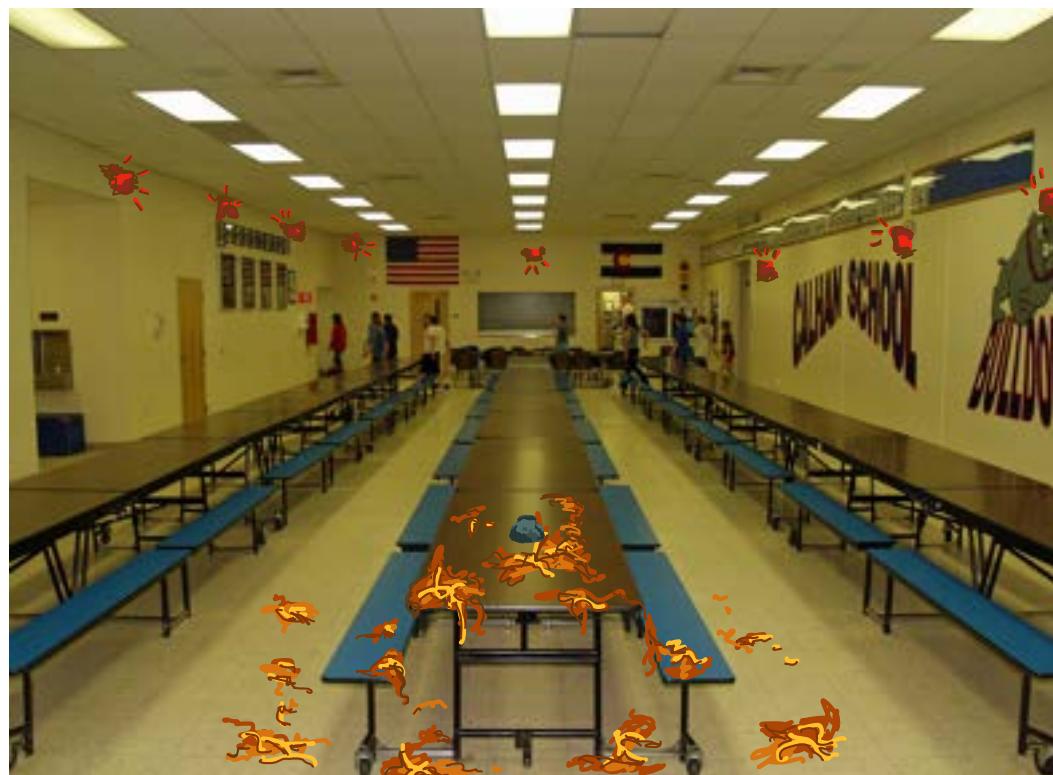


This time she decided to burst through Marilyn's door and start yelling at her. Marilyn tried to protect her space by slamming the door which pushed her father's girlfriend back.

Her father's girlfriend used this to press charges against her. She ended up being sentenced to a month and 20 days in a juvenile hall.



Remembering her time there years later, Marilyn said "You shouldn't have sent me to prison, because you made me a criminal."



Feeling bitter about her circumstances, Marilyn began throwing tantrums and having outbursts on her first day in the hall.



The staff's solution was to throw Marilyn into solitary confinement for over a week.

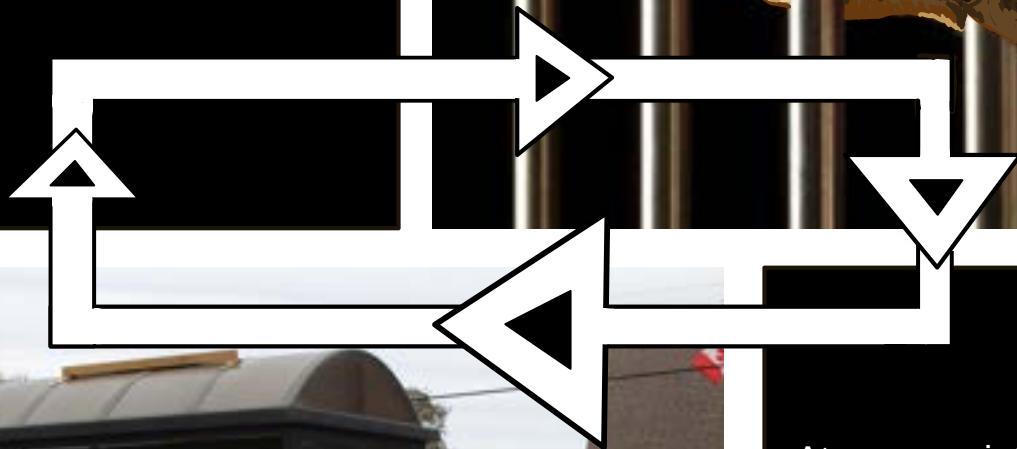
After that week she learned to "program", meaning she learned to live without her freedom. She started complying with the staff's commands and began working in the hall just to avoid the isolation of solitary confinement.



After her release she realized that she couldn't return to her abusive father and his partners so she turned to the streets in order to survive.



This resulted in a 20 year cycle in her life of going from the streets to prison to programs and back again, all while being addicted to crack.



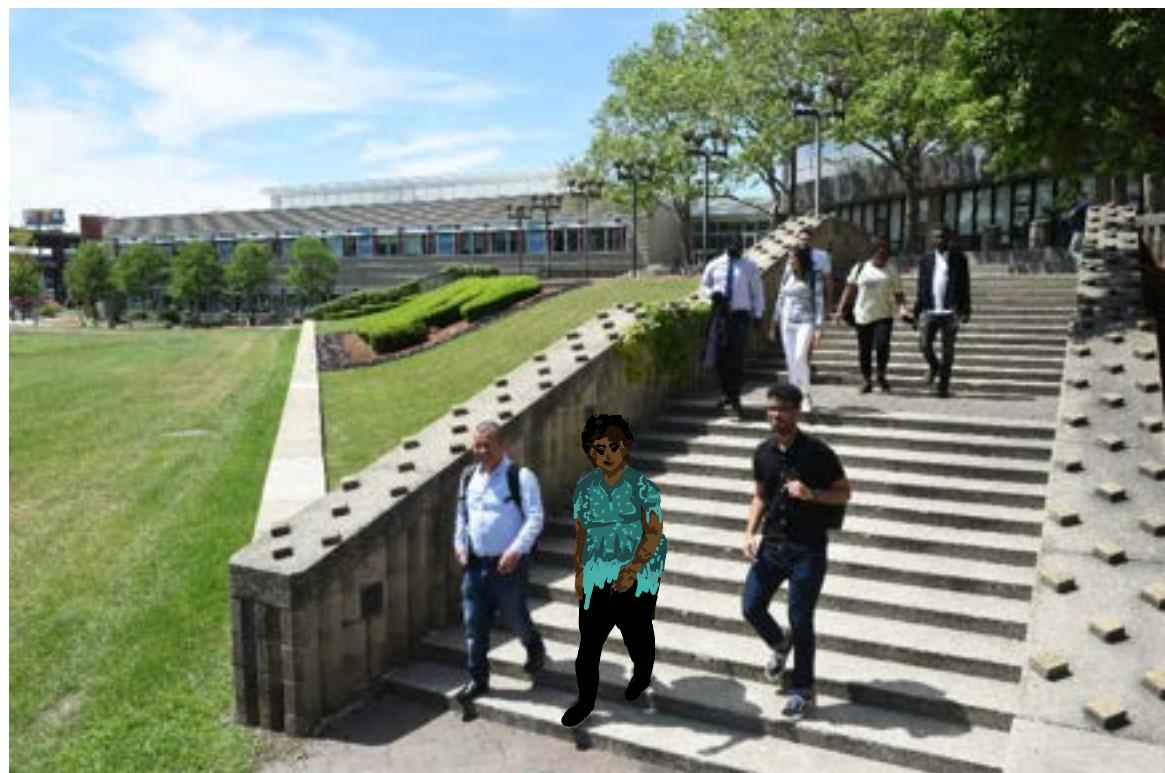
At some points she was using incarceration as a method to avoid homelessness and gain access to basic healthcare like pap smears and dental work.

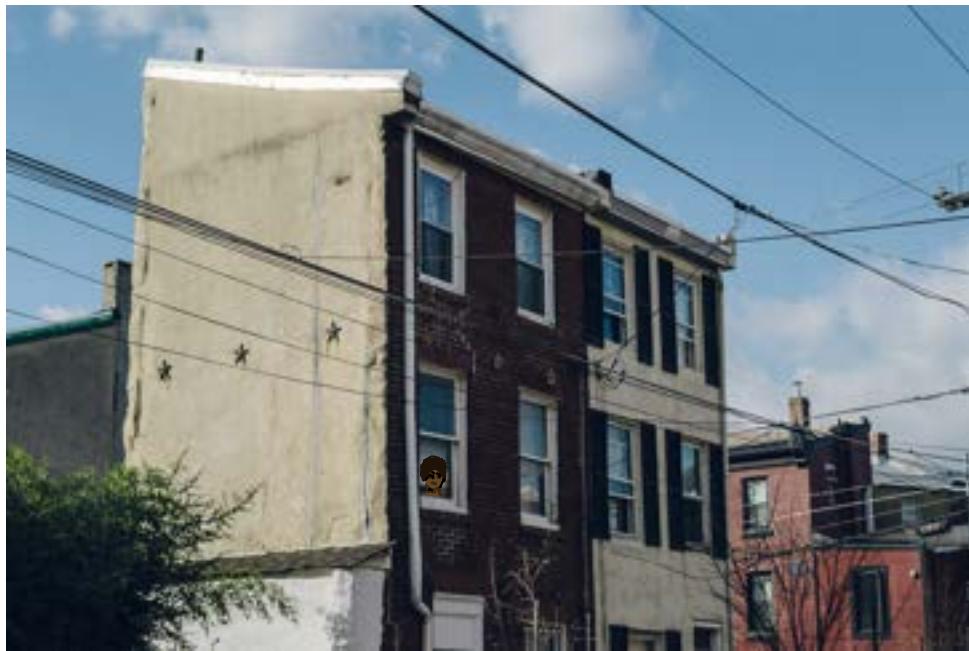
Towards the end of this period she was introduced to a non profit called Jewish Vocational Services.



The program was the first place where she felt like her intelligence was respected and seen. Through this program she was able to gain a job where her intelligence was again appreciated.

With the encouragement of her coworkers she enrolled in college and got a degree in health education. Along the way she also had to battle and eventually win against a drug relapse.





Years later Marilyn worked her way towards a PhD in education. However, this didn't solve all of her issues. With an advanced degree she could still only afford section 8 housing.

Marilyn's background made it harder to find high level positions because of their restrictive nature.



As a black woman with a record the odds were stacked against her, but Marilyn had fought too hard to accept this reality. She drew on her education and personal experiences to create her own opportunity and founded a non-profit called Because Black is Still Beautiful.



Through her organization she now aims to create safe, empowering, and educational spaces for black women in circumstances that she still faces everyday. She also has publications where she examines the effects of incarceration on women, including her autobiography "From Crack to College and Vice Versa."

ROAD STORIES

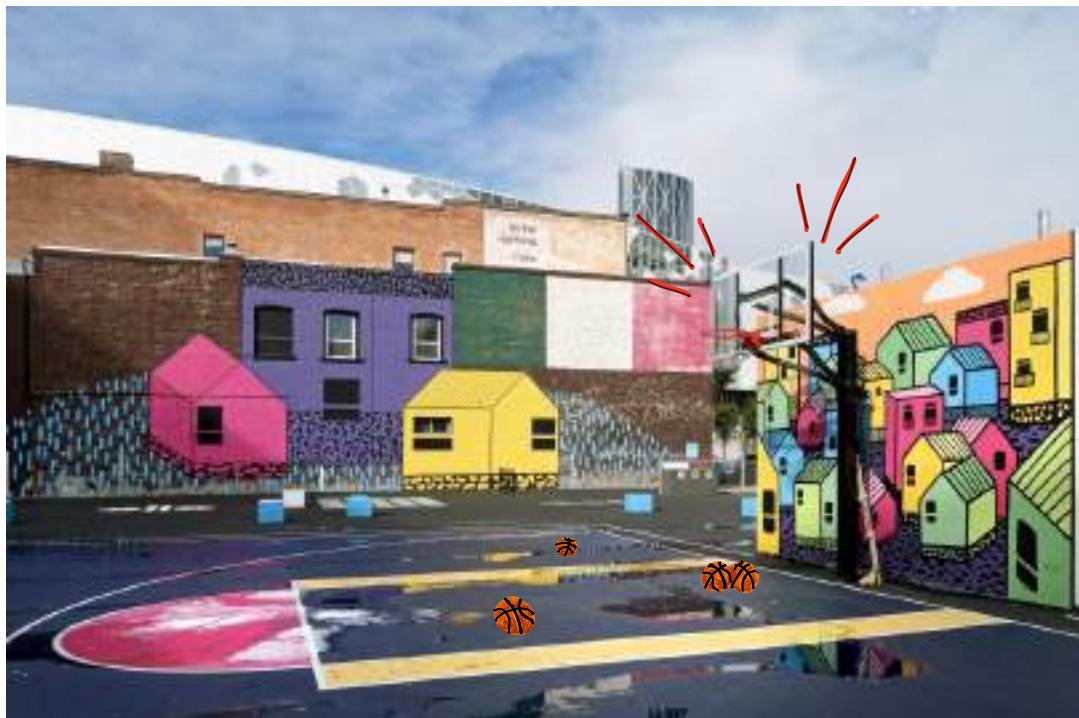


Roca's mission is to be a relentless force in disrupting incarceration, poverty, and racism by engaging the young adults, police, and systems at the center of urban violence in relationships to address trauma, find hope, and drive change.



Roca finds and focuses only on young people at the center of urban violence – those who are traumatized, full of distrust, and are trapped in a cycle of violence and poverty that traditional youth programs alone can't break. Roca also builds relationships with the institutions young people interact with – like the police and other system partners – to spark new thinking about working with young people who are traumatized and stuck.

16-to-24-year-olds who have experienced extensive trauma and are the primary victims or drivers of urban violence make up Roca's target group. These people may find themselves in many disadvantageous circumstances:



- Involvement in the criminal justice system
- Lower literacy, and typically no high-school degree or GED
- No formal or sustained employment history
- Involvement with guns, gangs, and drugs
- Having failed out or dropped out of programs, schools, and jobs
- Being young parents

The intervention model Roca stands by typically takes 4 years to complete.

Trauma is fear, so they start by providing safety and stability. They find young people at the center of violence and show up at their door—and keep showing up every day until they open up.



Trauma keeps young people stuck in survival mode, so they keep repeating the same negative behaviors. Roca's cognitive behavioral theory (Rewire CBT) skills heal trauma by building new neural pathways.



Relapse is a crucial moment of learning, so Roca relentlessly support each young person through temporary failures, no matter how many times it takes.



They also make sure to relentlessly engage a vast array of police and other system partners to test new strategies, share critical information, and coordinate case management to improve outcomes for young people and the whole community. Peacemaking circles for mutual understanding are frequently held.

A STORY ABOUT **JOVANI** AND **ROCA**

Jovani Smith was taken away from his parents at the age of 1 and put into foster care. Multiple forms of abuse from his father onto himself, his siblings, and his mother were the cause.

He joined crips when he was 12. Soon after came dealing drugs, playing with guns, and fighting.

Jovani was stabbed in the head and shot in his leg twice during this period.



He was eventually sentenced to 2 years in prison at 15 years old, and each time he came out, he would return because he consistently fell back to his previous life of gangbanging.



Jovani moved to Massachusetts from New York to move away from this life, but he couldn't escape it on his own and he was incarcerated for breaking and entering.



This is where Roca entered the picture. But the integration of Roca's philosophy into Jovani's life was not easy. Jovani's first meeting got so heated that he pulled a knife on his youth worker, Melvin, while inside Roca's office.



Roca decided to shut the building down for the rest of the day so the Melvin and Jovani could talk it out in a peacemaking circle. "What's our issue?" "What can I learn about Melvin, as a person?" They overcame the argument, and Jovani began getting in touch with his emotions.



CBT helped Jovani. CBT efforts mostly involving speaking to anger itself and how to control it.

Sadly, due to financial difficulties, Jovani went back to drug dealing. Still, Roca relentlessly came back to him, never giving up. Fights and verbal altercations followed, but Jovani eventually decided to return to Roca.



Fast forward to 2019: Roca helped Jovani go to school for Psychology, and helped him secure a job as a pastry chef, ending the cycle of relapse with stability.



Roca aims for reduced incarceration. Roca aims for sustained employment. Roca aims for improved parenting. Jovani is one of many who have worked with Roca and can vouch for its positive impact on the lives of hundreds.