

Your first days free

What to Expect

from the experts*



A practical guide
for those returning
to freedom from
prison, full of tips,
resources and
proven strategies
for success

*former prisoners!





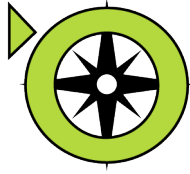
OurJourney is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded by a group of North Carolina men who met behind bars, reconnected in the free world and determined together to do more than just celebrate their individual freedom.

We want to combine our experiences, our resources and our talents to help those who will join us on this side of the razor wire, while never forgetting those who remain behind it.

With an emphasis on meeting the immediate needs of our returning citizens during their first 30 to 90 days, OurJourney is a new approach to freedom, where being released from prison isn't just an occasion to celebrate, but also

a journey to join.

P.O. Box 2862
Rocky Mount, NC 27802



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**Second Edition
September 2023**

This booklet does not contain any legal advice, nor should anything written herein be interpreted as such. The views expressed are those of OurJourney, a private nonprofit organization, and not necessarily those of the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction.

Many of the pictures in this booklet, including the one on the cover, are from a video called *The Best Is Yet To Come*, produced by OurJourney Media and available for viewing at ourjourney2gether.com.

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There is nothing like it. No experience known to mankind can compare to walking out of prison.

On one hand there is the excitement and euphoria of the freedom that awaits you: no more count times, no more endless concrete and razor wire, no more prison food and clothes.

On the other hand there is the anxiousness, perhaps even anxiety, as you consider all the challenges that await: reuniting with family, finding a job and rebuilding your financial life, becoming independent, making everyday decisions again.

This booklet will give you advice from those who have already navigated this experience, men who began their own journey from prison to freedom.

Your journey will be different, of course, and only you can determine your future, but inside this booklet you will find proven tips for success and encouragement for the road ahead.

From OurJourney to you, **welcome home.**

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INTRODUCTION

That car ride home, no matter who picks you up, isn't just a ride down a road or highway; it's also an emotional ride. The further the prison gates fade into the distance, and the closer you get to your destination, the more your thoughts turn from the past to the future.

Prison is such a burden—emotionally, spiritually, mentally. It's the toughest thing you've ever done and now, as you leave it behind, you can't help but feel so relieved. For the first time in however long you were incarcerated, you won't have to be "on point." As the mileposts pass on your return trip to freedom, you'll feel an enormous amount of pressure fall off you, like having the shackles on your heart drop to the ground.

But at some point on this trip your thoughts will turn to what's ahead. Of course, this won't be the first time you've had these "future thoughts." For at least the last year, but certainly in the last several days and weeks, you've hardly been able to think about anything else. Even if your home plan was settled long ago, even if you have a job waiting for you when you get out, even if you know your family is all there with open arms, you still couldn't help, as the clock ticked down and your release date got closer, thinking ahead and wondering, maybe even worrying.

And those thoughts will overcome you again sometime on the return trip to freedom, when it sinks in that getting out of prison, while such a relief, is just the first chapter in a story still unwritten, one that is far more unpredictable than life behind the razor wire.

We have some good news for you: Most of the situations you worried about before your release and will think about in the moments and hours immediately thereafter, will not be as difficult as you imagine.

You're worried you won't find a job...you almost certainly will, probably sooner than you expect.

You're worried family members won't accept you freely...some probably won't but most just need (and want) for you to prove you've changed.

You're worried people in society will shun you...most will never know you were ever incarcerated and while, yes, you'll always meet people who hold your past against you, the vast majority of those people will have no direct power over your life and future.

You're worried, especially if you were locked up for any length of time, that society has passed you by and that the new technology will overwhelm you. The neat thing about new technology is that it is, for the most part, extremely user-friendly. You'll probably end up loving it, even if you've never touched a smartphone or operated a smart television.

You're going to have challenges, no doubt, but if surviving prison has taught you anything it's this: You can do it. You WILL do it.

Our advice? In the immediate days and weeks after your release, put the long term goals you may have made while in prison to the side. You know what we're talking about: That plan to open your own auto detailing or tattoo shop, that one about rebuilding the relationship with the child you haven't seen in years, the one about buying your own home, the ones you used to think about on your bunk after lights out, the ones you may have even drawn out on paper and looked at over and over, losing yourself in hour upon hour of thought and reflection.

There's nothing wrong with those aspirations and goals. Indeed, having those dreams proves you're a man of hope and ambition. It's just that, well, unless you manage to leave prison with a large bank account and a perfect environment awaiting you, then you aren't going to have time when you get out to focus on them.

Here is the best advice we can possibly give you: Take care of all the little things, those immediate needs you're going to have. Do it the right way and your path into the future will unfold in front of you in ways you never could have imagined laying on that prison bunk. You will never build the house of your dreams or open your own business, much less rebuild relationships with your family and friends, if you don't start small, if you don't take one step and then another.

Think about it: You did this in prison. It's how you survived! You

didn't wake up every day thinking about your release date; you woke up every day thinking about how to get through that day, then the next, until your release date finally appeared.

Remember the Two P's: Patience and Perseverance. One of the biggest mistakes guys make after getting out is trying to move too fast. You think, "I've lost precious months or years from my life, so I have to get it all back NOW." But you don't. In fact, you can't. And nobody expects you to—not your family, not your church, not your parole officer. What they have a right to expect, and what you should expect from yourself, is that you will make progress each and every day, that you will persevere regardless of how hard it is.

That's what this booklet is about: how to make progress, how to cross the bridge from prison to freedom, written by people who have already crossed that bridge, people who know both the challenges and the way through those challenges. We've learned the hard way often, but we've learned, and now we want to share it with you, one step at a time.



ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Getting out of prison is just the beginning. Rebuilding your life requires hard work, perseverance and the spirit of a champion. It's never easy, but OurJourney believes that the same inner strength that got you through prison can lead you past the challenges of freedom down the path to self-sufficiency.

We also believe that sometimes even the strongest among us just need a little help getting started.

OurJourney's Essential Services program provides free professional, personal assistance to any returning citizen in North Carolina who wants to gain the tools and skills necessary to rebuild a life after incarceration. We offer assistance in the following ways:

- Writing a resume
- Prepping for a job interview
- Enrolling for free healthcare insurance or free medication (to those who qualify)
- Handling stress
- Learning basic budgeting skills
- Learning basic computer/smartphone skills
- Learning basic nutrition skills
- Learning basic relationship skills
- Learning how to dress for success

- Registering to vote (when legally able)

To learn more or to enroll, call 252-220-9516 or visit www.ourjourney2gether.com/essential-services.



RECONNECTING WITH FAMILY

Reconnecting with loved ones is usually the most anticipated moment for the man counting down the days. It is also, conversely, the moment that often causes the most anxiety once that final day arrives.

Everyone's situation is different, of course. A man getting out of prison after only one year will have much less anxiety about reconnecting with his children and spouse than a man getting out after a decade or more. But there is one thing that almost always remains the same no matter the situation. You will have members of your family doubt you. It might be a spouse, a teenage or adult child, a father or mother, brother or sister, aunt or uncle. They've heard all about how you've changed, how you're not the same person anymore, about how this time it's going to be different. But they doubt.

Maybe you've lied to them so much in the past that they simply don't take your word for it anymore. Maybe during your incarceration you accumulated so many write-ups that they just assume you'll continue disobeying the rules on the other side of the razor wire. Or maybe they fear that your coming home will cause disruption to the family and take it out on you by not accepting you with open arms.

You'll be tempted to do one of two things, and we strongly suggest you do neither: Get defensive or give up. You might think to yourself, "If they loved me like they're supposed to they would've been more supportive while I was locked up and more supportive now." You might tell them how wrong they are not to believe you or openly question their love.

Remember, your incarceration was extremely difficult for them too; maybe even more difficult if they were left to pick up the pieces, raise your kids alone, settle debts you left behind, to say nothing of dealing with the enormous emotional and mental anguish that your incarceration caused. Put simply, they have every right to doubt you. If you get defensive and defiant, you'll just prove to them that they're right not to believe you've changed.

And giving up on them is also the wrong thing to do, even if they've made it clear that they want nothing to do with you.

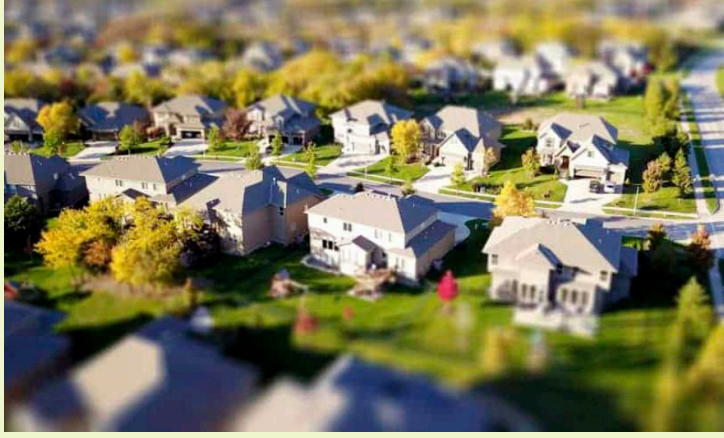
So what do you do with family members who doubt you? The Two P's: Patience and Perseverance. Give them space and time and just keep doing what you need to do to live your Best Life. They doubt you, yes, but most of them don't want to. They want to believe you! They love you and want the best for you, but they just need to be convinced that you want the best for yourself and that you truly aren't the same man they watched being cuffed and hauled off to jail.

Sometimes the hurt runs so deeply that you wonder if they'll ever believe you, no matter what you do. Maybe they won't but probably they will...in time. The best advice we can give you is to focus your attention on rebuilding your life the right way—don't give up but also don't get distracted. That way even if they never come around, as painful as that might be, you will still have achieved your Best Life.

Now a word about small children: the younger your children are when you get out, the more likely you're going to feel the urge to reclaim your role as their father. That's only natural. Just remember, your child has lived without your presence for however long you were incarcerated. They love you unconditionally and will almost definitely not have any of the doubts about you that your older children might have, but they've lived without daddy and aren't too sure how he fits in now.

You might be tempted to play the role of the benevolent dad and try to make up for the time apart by splurging on gifts. Or you might be tempted to reclaim your role as the disciplinary parent, especially if you feel everyone has spoiled your child in your absence. Resist both temptations, especially at first. You don't have to indulge your children for them to love you; they already do. You don't have to make up for lost time; they won't hold that lost time against you. And you don't need to remind them that you're the boss; they know that instinctively. All they need for you is the single most important thing you couldn't give them during your incarceration: Your time, your attention. Listen to them, play with them, help them with their homework.

Easing back into their lives will make it less traumatic for them, for you and for those who have cared for them during your absence.



HOUSING

By the time you read this booklet you will either have an approved residence to go to or have been classified as homeless. If you have an approved residence to go to, whether it's the home of a family member, a transitional home or perhaps even your own home, consider yourself blessed and feel free to skip this section.

If, however, you are currently homeless, nobody needs to tell you how dire your situation is. Fortunately, there is help available. It might just be temporary, and it might be difficult to find if you've been convicted of a sex offense, but there are organizations that will help.

In addition, the following organizations are either statewide or serve in several North Carolina counties. If you are homeless, please reach out to these organizations today:

- Salvation Army 800-725-2769 Statewide
- NC United Way Dial 211 Statewide
- Crossroads Reentry 704-499-1332 24 counties

There is another housing resource that is nearly every county in North Carolina. It's called Oxford House and it is mainly for those who battle addictions to drugs and alcohol (or both). The following information is from the Oxford Houses of North Carolina website:

Oxford Houses of North Carolina, established in 1991, is a statewide network of recovery residences, chartered by Oxford House, Inc., the 501(c)(3) umbrella corporation. Oxford Houses are peer-driven, democratically run, and self-supported group residences for individuals in recovery from a substance use disorder. Currently, the network of Oxford

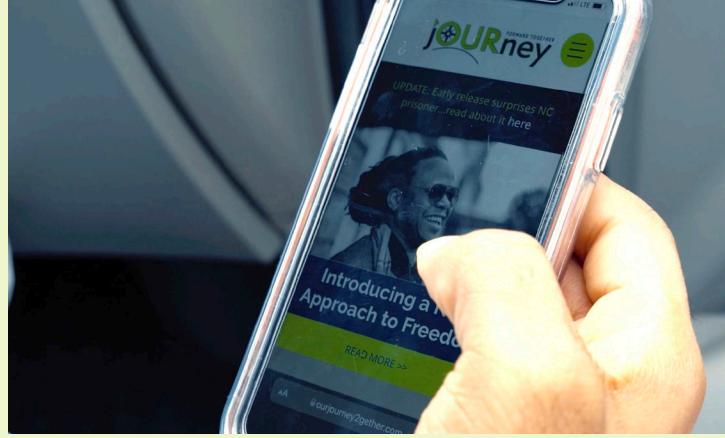
Houses is over 3,300 in the United States.

The first North Carolina Oxford Houses were established in Durham and Asheville, NC. As of June 2023, there are 304 houses in North Carolina, with locations statewide. With an average of 8 beds per house, there are more than 2,400 available beds across the state. Individuals typically enter an Oxford House after completing a treatment program or reentering from a correctional setting.

You can check availability in your area by going to oxfordvacancies.com and selecting your county and Male for Gender. (If you're accessing the website on a smartphone, you might want to click "Show Full Grid" to get all of the available information about each Oxford House.) Oxford House Senior Reentry Coordinator Jesse Wilson suggests that you contact multiple Oxford Houses in your area that have vacancies, as each house decides on its own who to accept into their house.

For more information about Oxford Houses in North Carolina, go to oxfordhouseenc.org or call Jesse Wilson at 828-845-5788 or Barbara Kidder at 336-250-9370.

If you have contacted ALL of the agencies and organizations above, and still have not been able to secure temporary housing, call OurJourney at 252-220-9516. While OurJourney doesn't provide housing, we might be able to help, depending on where you are.



CELL PHONES

You can't function in today's world without a cell phone. For one, there aren't any public pay phones anywhere anymore, so without your own phone you're stuck hoping someone or some business will let you use their phone to make calls. For another, phones these days are necessary for far more than just making calls.

A cell phone, especially a smartphone with internet capabilities, will be your lifeline to finding employment, managing your money, keeping up with your post-release requirements and more. Put simply, getting a cell phone isn't an option anymore, it's a necessity right up there with getting your driver's license.

If you aren't familiar with cell phones, here's a quick primer on the topic.

There are two basic types of cell phones on the market today: flip phones and smartphones. A flip phone is a hinged cell phone that is more compact when closed. The cover "flips open" to reveal the screen, keypad, speaker and microphone. Also called a "clamshell phone," the flip phone is a basic cell phone with limited or no internet access. You can make calls, send texts and take pictures with most flip phones, but not much more.

A smartphone is a mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer; it typically has a touchscreen interface, internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications. You can do all the things with a smartphone that you can with a flip phone, plus send and receive email, access your bank account, play

games, download books and much more.

There are two main varieties of smartphones: the iPhone, made by Apple and powered by iOS, and Android, which is an open-source operating system used by smartphones that are not made by Apple, such as Samsung, Google and LG. Most people have a strong preference for one or the other, but our advice for those just getting out of prison is to take whichever one you can get (Android phones generally have much cheaper models available than iPhones.). You can always switch or upgrade later, but the truth is that you can do all the things you need to do with either iPhone or Android.

That said, not all smartphones have the same specifications. Here are the two key specifications you need to understand before purchasing a smartphone:

- Model year. If you're considering purchasing a used cell phone, which many people do these days, make sure you aren't buying one that is so old that the manufacturer will stop supporting it soon. For example, as of this writing Apple continues to offer support (software upgrades and security) for the iPhone 7, but they won't when the next model is released, meaning it doesn't make any sense to purchase a used iPhone 7.
- Storage space. All smartphones have a certain amount of gigabytes for users to store data, such as photos, videos, text messages, contact information and apps. The more gigs, the more data you can store. A 16 GB smartphone might be sufficient for your first phone, but you'll quickly fill it up and wish you'd bought one with more gigs. It's impossible for OurJourney to recommend a "minimum gig amount," because the technology is always advancing, but if you can afford a smartphone with at least 64 GBs, it should last you quite a while before you run out of storage space.

One more piece of advice if you are considering purchasing a used smartphone: Before spending your money on a used phone you need to make sure it's "unlocked." An unlocked phone is one in which the operation of the device is not contractually bound to a carrier. If the phone is still under contract the carrier "locks" the phone into its network so that it won't work on any other carrier's service.

So how do you tell if the used phone you're considering purchasing is unlocked? If you're buying it from a reputable online dealer, such as Amazon, Best Buy, Apple or any of the major phone suppliers, they will tell you in the description of the phone if it's unlocked.

You can also call the customer service number of your preferred carrier to ask whether the used phone is unlocked. Here are the phone numbers for some well-known wireless carriers:

- AT&T 1-800-331-0500
- Verizon 1-800-922-0204
- T-Mobile 1-877-453-1304
- Cricket Wireless 1-800-274-2538
- Mint Mobile 1-800-683-7392
- Straight Talk 1-877-430-2355
- Boost Mobile 1-833-502-6678

If you buy a phone that isn't unlocked you can usually have it unlocked by your preferred service provider, unless the phone has been reported lost, stolen or involved in fraudulent activity. To unlock a used phone you'll need to physically take it to your preferred service provider and request it.

Some of us had a cellphone given to us by family or friends either on our release date or soon thereafter. Most of the rest of us made sure to get a cellphone soon after our release, even if it meant spending what little money we had on it. Then there were those who had to go a different route and get their phone and phone service through the federal government's Affordable Connectivity Program (sometimes referred to as "Obama phones" because the program was created during the Obama Administration). If that's you, here's what you need to know about getting a free government-provided phone:

First, you are not automatically qualified to get an ACP phone simply because you were incarcerated. In fact, you probably won't be able to get a free phone through the ACP immediately after your release from prison, because you will first need to prove your eligibility. You are eligible if you receive benefits from any of these programs in North Carolina:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps or SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- Veterans Pension and Survivor's Benefit.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (BIA)
- Tribally Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF)
- Tribal Head Start (only those households meeting its income qualifying standard)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

You may also qualify if your total household income is at or under

135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

You **MUST** have a street address to receive a free ACP phone. The address can be a transition home or even a homeless shelter.

To see if you qualify or to apply for a free ACP phone, contact any of the three major providers in North Carolina:

- Access Wireless www.accesswireless.com
1-800-464-6010
- Assurance Wireless www.assurancewireless.com
1-888-898-4888
- Safelink Wireless www.safelinkwireless.com
1-800-723-3546

Keep in mind that the free phone you receive through ACP, should you qualify, almost certainly will not be as advanced as the latest iPhone or high-end Samsung Galaxy phone. It will, however, provide you with all the features you'll need during your first weeks and months out of prison to help you get back on your feet.



TRANSPORTATION

Do you have an automobile waiting for you when you get out? Consider yourself blessed because most of us didn't, at least not a car of our own. If you're like us, then aside from reconnecting with family, transportation is probably the biggest challenge you'll face in the immediate days after your release. You'll need a ride everywhere: to check in with your parole officer, to see your grandma, to talk to someone about a job, and, yes, even to get to the DMV to get your Driver's License. It's like you're a teenager again.

And also like a teenager, getting your own car will be a huge deal for you. But that might take time, so until you get your own set of wheels, here's our advice for your transportation needs:

- Family and friends. Sure, they have their own busy lives and sometimes can't give you a lift when you absolutely need it, such as to see your parole officer, but your best means of transportation until you get your own vehicle is from those who love you and want to see you succeed. Just don't abuse it and, when possible, offer to pay for their gas.
- Use public transportation if available. Due to Covid, several North Carolina cities continue to offer free fares for their intercity bus services, including Raleigh and Durham. Contact your local city bus service provider to see if they're doing the same or to see if you qualify for discounted fares.
- Contact nonprofit organizations for transportation. Some local nonprofit organizations offer free bus passes and/or free transpor-

tation to low-income individuals, such as the Salvation Army and Traveler's Aid. Refer to your Reentry Resource Guide for more information about charitable transportation opportunities in your area. If your Reentry Resource Guide lists a reentry organization under the One Stop Resources section, nearly all of those organizations can help you with transportation.

- Uber/Lyft. Uber and Lyft are two transportation companies with smartphone apps that allow passengers to hail a ride with independent drivers who charge fares and get paid. They operate like city-owned taxis but are less regulated and usually more expensive. To contact Uber or Lyft about a ride, download their apps to your smartphone and follow the instructions. You will need to have either a standard credit/debit card or a prepaid debit card to book a ride with either service as neither takes cash. However, both do offer free rides to get to job interviews or job training, and sometimes for the first two weeks of employment.
- Traditional taxis. Every major city has at least one traditional taxi service that, like Uber and Lyft, will pick you up and take you wherever you want to go for a fee. Their fees are typically lower than Uber's and Lyft's, and they often take cash, but you can't always schedule them to arrive exactly when you need transportation like you can with Uber or Lyft. Refer to your Reentry Resource Guide for more information about taxi services in your area.

Getting Your Driver's License

The first step to regaining your independence, and a necessity before you can even think about getting your own car, is to have a current Driver's License. If you aren't staying in North Carolina after your release, you'll need to investigate the requirements for obtaining a driver's license in your new state, but for those who will remain here in North Carolina and don't already have a current Driver's License, we have some advice.

First, North Carolina has a policy requiring you to prove you have automobile insurance before you can get your Driver's License. The catch is, most insurance companies won't issue you a policy unless you have a Driver's License. This puts many newly-released prisoners in a tough spot.

There are, however, a few of solutions that we've discovered.

Get a Learner's Permit instead of a Driver's License when you go to the DMV. This isn't the best option, obviously, and will make you feel even more like a teenager again, but it is a possibility. The DMV will issue you a learner's permit without requiring proof of insurance, and you can then get insurance using your Learner's Permit. You won't be able to drive without a licensed driver in the car with you, so this won't

necessarily solve all your transportation issues, but it might work for you if you don't have access to a car to drive anyway.

Another solution is to have someone add you to their insurance coverage as a driver of their vehicle. To take advantage of this option you will need to have had a Driver's License at some point, even if it has expired. Adding you on an insurance policy may increase the premium for that policy, so you should be prepared to pay the difference if possible. Once you've been added to the policy, you can take proof of that to the DMV and get your Driver's License.

Finally, North Carolina allows drivers to get what's called "non-owner's insurance," a policy for those who don't yet own a vehicle but need to get their Driver's License. Remember, in North Carolina you are required to have automobile insurance whether you own a vehicle or not. Call your preferred insurance provider to ask about "non-owner insurance." Be prepared, however, because these policies are typically expensive.

Once you have automobile insurance, and assuming your Driver's License has expired, the next step is to head to the DMV, but there are two things you should definitely do before you go to get your Driver's License.

- Study the DMV Driver Handbook so that you're ready for the written test. If you didn't get a DMV Driver Handbook in your OurJourney First Aid Reentry Kit, you can access it free of charge at MyNCDMV.gov. There are also numerous sites that let you test your knowledge by offering free tests similar to the ones you'll see at the DMV, such as www.dmv-practice-test.com/north-carolina/car/practice-test-1.
- If you even suspect that you might have outstanding traffic fines or court fees, you should call the DMV Helpdesk at 919-715-7000 and ask before you head to the DMV. Several of us can testify how disheartening it is to get all the way to the DMV, pass the vision, written and driving tests, then find out that before the DMV would issue us our Driver's License we had to pay several hundred dollars in back fees that we'd forgotten we owed. Our advice: Call first!



EMPLOYMENT

You need a job. But you already know that, don't you? A job is the one thing that will make almost everything else possible, from getting your own place to getting your own car, from providing for your kids to paying for your own groceries.

The bad news is some companies won't give you the time of day because of your felony conviction. The good news is there are less and less of those companies nowadays. You're getting out of prison at a good time. For one, while society isn't exactly excited to have you back, most people today realize that the best way for you not to be a burden anymore to your community is to remove many of the obstacles that could prevent you from finding employment.

In other words, you'll have options, which comes as a surprise to most guys getting out of prison. You're probably not going to land a job right out of prison in upper management or as a CEO, but you also don't need to settle for anything offering only minimum wage. Employers these days are desperate for workers and even fast-food restaurants are offering as much as double the minimum wage (or more), depending on location.

And companies today actually have an incentive to hire the formerly incarcerated. The federal government has a program called the Work Opportunity Tax Credit that rewards companies for hiring targeted groups of job seekers, including former prisoners. Mentioning this tax credit to a prospective employer could help land you a job.

In addition there are many other programs that help ex-felons find

employment, such as the Salvation Army, Goodwill (who actually provides former prisoners with CDL training), and local recruiting and placement services. Many temp agencies are also great places for the job seeker just getting out of prison. You may also check with the following two websites:

- [honestjobs.com](https://www.honestjobs.com), which was founded by a formerly incarcerated person.
- [hirefelons.org](https://www.hirefelons.org) and
- [ncsc.com/companies-that-hire-felons](https://www.ncsc.com/companies-that-hire-felons)

In addition, every North Carolina county is serviced by a local NCWorks, a state agency that exists solely for the purpose of helping North Carolinians find employment.

Refer to your Reentry Resource Guide for more information about job placement services in your area.

You may have heard about “Ban the Box,” which is the slogan for efforts across the country and here in North Carolina to remove the box on the typical job application that asks an applicant to check if he’s ever been convicted of a crime. We want to discuss this because there is widespread misunderstanding about Ban the Box.

In 2019, then-president Donald Trump signed into law the Fair Chance Act, which prohibits federal agencies and government contractors from asking about an applicant’s criminal history before making a conditional employment offer (with some exceptions). Then, in August of 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order 158, which applies the standard of the Fair Chance Act to state agencies and state-government contractors.

Please note that both the Fair Chance Act and Executive Order 158 apply **ONLY** to government agencies and contractors working on behalf of the government. They **DO NOT** apply to private corporations or businesses. Many larger companies have followed the lead of the federal and state governments and made Ban the Box their own policy, but certainly not all.

This means there’s a good chance you will be asked about your criminal history on job applications. Obviously, you should answer truthfully. Your criminal history will come up when the prospective employer conducts a routine background check anyway, so lying about it on the application won’t get you anywhere but out the door. However, most applications allow space for you to explain your criminal history. We suggest that you be honest but concise and, if you really have learned from your mistakes, to end your explanation with something like, “I paid a heavy price for my bad decisions and now want to demonstrate

how much I've changed. I am not the same man that committed that crime."

That won't necessarily guarantee you a job, but from our experience if you're honest and humble, many people will give you a fair chance.

Earlier we said you shouldn't settle for just any job, and that's good advice in today's workforce environment. However, the flip side to that is you shouldn't turn down a good paying job just because it's a job you won't enjoy. To get where you want to go, especially coming right out of prison, you sometimes need to do what you don't want to do. Just tell yourself: "This doesn't have to be a forever job." Plenty of us took jobs right out of prison that we then left months later once something else better came along, including working at a fast food restaurant and even a chicken processing plant. Just remember: You owe a debt of gratitude to a company for taking a chance on you coming right out of prison, so make sure you leave on good terms. Work a notice of at least two weeks, if not a month, and say thank you even if you didn't particularly enjoy the work.

Before we move to the next section, we should mention ways to make a little income until you get a job or in addition to having a job.

- Craigslist day jobs. You can find people looking for one-day jobs in your area on craigslist.com, mostly manual labor jobs such as helping people move or harvesting crops at local farms. The pay is usually decent and in cash.
- Plasma donation. Donating plasma can pay up to \$1,000 per month. Just beware that some plasma collection companies might discriminate against convicted felons, especially sex offenders. If you encounter such a place, just try another company.
- MTurk. MTurk, which stands for Mechanical Turk, is an online marketplace that makes it easier for individuals and businesses to outsource their processes and jobs to a distributed workforce who can perform these tasks virtually. This could include anything from conducting simple data validation and research to more subjective tasks like survey participation. MTurk is offered by Amazon. The pay isn't much, and you have to fill out an application and be accepted into the program (don't worry, they don't even ask if you're an ex-felon), but MTurk is a viable way to make some side money. There are dozens of places online that say they'll pay you to take surveys, but in our experience most of them are either outright scams or don't live up to their promises. MTurk does, and all you need is a free Amazon account to apply. For more information go to mturk.com.



HANDLING MONEY

Getting a job is great, but what you do with your money is just as important. Our first advice when it comes to managing your money is to avoid the mindset where you think you have to get the latest and greatest of everything. It's tempting to get those first few paychecks and splurge, but do you really need a 72" TV or a brand new PlayStation? Rebuilding your life the right way means you will need to make wise decisions with your money.

If you're able to live rent-free with family or friends, we suggest you adopt the 50/50 Principle when it comes to your paycheck: Spend 50% on essentials, such as clothing and gas, and save the remaining 50%. Do this until you get your own place and you'll have a nice start down the path to independence. If you have so many financial obligations that this isn't possible, such as restitution or child support, come up with your own formula for saving money, even if it means going without certain things.

You'll need to open a checking account at some point, and the good news is you'll have a lot of options, more than were available just 10 years ago. In addition to traditional banks with lobbies and drive-throughs, there are dozens of online-only banking options. Let's look at the pros for both traditional banking and online-only banking.

Traditional Banking

- Cash deposits. While some online-only banks work with places like CVS and Walmart to allow cash deposits, there are usually fees for that service, so if you plan to deposit a lot of cash into your

account, traditional banking is your best option.

- Cash withdrawal. Most online-only banks offer access to ATMs, just like traditional banks, but they also usually set strict limits on how much you can withdraw at one time, while a teller at a bank might be able to give you more cash.
- In-person customer service. Because traditional banks do maintain branches, you can get help from a banker in person during normal business hours.
- Broader range of accounts and products. Traditional banks generally provide a wider array of accounts and products than online-only banks, such as safe deposit boxes or check-writing privileges.

Online-only Banking

- Lower fees. In many cases, account fees at online-only banks are lower than they are at traditional banks. For instance, most digital banks don't charge a monthly account maintenance fee, whereas many traditional banks do. A number of online-only banks also do not require a minimum deposit to open an account.
- Better Interest Rates. At a lot of online-only banks, you'll earn a higher interest rate on checking and savings accounts than you would at traditional banks, sometimes by significant amounts.
- Large ATM networks. Many online-only banks provide access to networks with thousands of ATMs—perhaps more ATMs than traditional banks. A digital bank might even reimburse the fees you pay to use those ATMs.
- Convenience. You can conduct business on any day, at any time and from any place, as long as you have a computer or a digital device. No need to head to a bank branch.

If you decide to open an account with a traditional bank, your options will vary depending on where you live. However, if you decide to go with an online-only bank, you can pick whichever one you like best. Here is a partial list of current online-only banks:

- Ally ally.com
- Axos axos.com
- Citi citi.com
- Chime chime.com
- Aspiration aspiration.com
- Upgrade upgrade.com
- Varo varo.com
- Discover discover.com

Regardless of which type of bank you choose, you should make sure

it offers free checking. One of the best pieces of financial advice we can give is never pay anybody a monthly fee to hold your money, especially when so many banks today offer free checking.

But do you really need a bank account these days? Why can't you just use CashApp or some other type of money app? After all, CashApp will let you direct-deposit your paycheck and it offers a debit card to use for spending, even ATM withdrawals. The answer is YES you need a checking account.

Why? Your checking account acts as a hub for all your financial transactions and helps you stay on top of bills and in tune with your budget. It's also an account with a lot of flexibility, allowing you to easily manage everyday finances like receiving paychecks, making purchases, and paying bills. Most importantly, a checking account offers you a lot more protection against fraud than CashApp or other money apps. Remember, a checking account isn't just a way to spend money; it's a way to manage your money.

Before leaving this topic, we should tell you that you must have a valid and current form of ID to open a bank account. Many of us assumed that we could open a bank account with the prison ID we took home with us, only to find out that banks (and most other places of transaction) won't accept that ID. If you need to open a bank account before you're ready to get your Driver's License, we recommend that you go to the DMV and get a State ID, which is a photo ID that you can use anywhere as proof of who you are. You'll need your Social Security card and prison-issued ID, plus \$10.

Using Your Debit Card

No matter what type of checking account you open, whether traditional or online-only, it will come with a debit card. Debit cards not only allow account access through ATMs but also allow you to pay for goods and services without writing a check. They are convenient and generally accepted anywhere Visa or MasterCard are accepted. However, using your debit card for payment is not always your best option. In fact, it can be dangerous.

Why? There are several reasons, but let's look at the main three:

- Pay now, reimburse later. If someone has fraudulently used your credit card, you don't have to pay the charge. But when somebody has fraudulently used your debit card, the money comes directly out of your account in real time. That means you're out the money while the bank does a leisurely examination of their records to investigate your fraud claim. Many consumers complaining to Privacy Rights Clearing House said they lost access to their funds for several weeks. In the meantime, they were caught short and

unable to pay their bills.

- Merchant disputes. The same problem affects merchant disputes. If you pay with a credit card when ordering something online, and that product comes damaged, broken or not at all, you can dispute the charge and stop payment with your credit card. If you used your debit card, the charge is paid when you made the order. By the time you find out the goods weren't what was advertised, the merchant has your cash and you're in the unenviable position of having to fight to get your money back.
- Account theft. Not only do credit cards offer more fraud protection than debit cards typically do, but when your credit card is compromised, the most the thief has access to is whatever the limit is on the card. But if someone steals your debit card information, they can potentially wipe out your entire checking account, leaving you with nothing, at least until you can resolve the matter with your bank, which could take weeks or even months.

While some financial experts say you should never use your debit card for anything other than cash withdrawals at ATMs, that isn't always practical. Other financial experts offer this advice: Never use your debit card to make online purchases and never use your debit card to make in-store payments if someone (a waiter, for example) must take your card out of your eyesight. Avoiding both greatly limits the opportunities for some dishonest person to gain access to your checking account.

Of course, following this advice presents a problem for someone just getting out of prison, doesn't it? If you're like most of us, you won't have a credit card in your name waiting for you when you get out, and getting a credit card isn't nearly as easy as getting a debit card because all you have to do to get a debit card is open a checking account.

So are we suggesting that you don't make any online purchases? No, that's hardly even practical these days. There are actually some debit cards you can get that aren't connected to your bank account.

- Prepaid Visa or MasterCard cards. You can buy these at any Walmart, Target, CVS or Walgreens, among countless other places. They come with money already loaded on them in various amounts. You pay whatever the amount is on the card plus a one-time transaction fee, usually around \$5. You can then use these cards anywhere Visa and MasterCard are accepted, including at all online retailers (such as Amazon and eBay). Once you've used all the funds on the card, you just toss the card because they aren't "reloadable."
- Bluebird American Express card. This card stands out from all the other prepaid options and is a great card to add to your wallet. Like a prepaid Visa or MasterCard card, you purchase a Bluebird Amer-

ican Express card. They are sold exclusively at Walmart and come with a one-time fee of \$5. Unlike most Visa or MasterCard prepaid cards, you decide how much money you want to put on your initial Bluebird card, from \$1 to \$500. You can then use your Bluebird card to make purchases up to that amount anywhere that accepts American Express, which is most places these days but not all.

What makes Bluebird a better option than a prepaid Visa or MasterCard card is that you can actually reload money on a Bluebird card. Rather than just tossing it once you've used the initial funds you put on it, you can add money back on it at whatever amount you choose, up to \$2,500 per day. And if you add funds to your Bluebird at Walmart, there isn't any fee. This makes a Bluebird American Express a great option for someone getting out of prison who wants to order online without the risk of having his debit card compromised.

And there's something else cool about the Bluebird. When you purchase your Bluebird card at Walmart, it's actually a "kit." To make it reloadable and take advantage of all of its features, you'll want to follow the instructions in the kit to register the card online with Bluebird. Once you do, they will mail you an actual Bluebird card with your name and unique account number on it. Anyone who sees it will assume it's an American Express credit card, not just a debit card, and you'll never have to toss it. Plus, once you register it you'll be able to download the terrific Bluebird app and manage your card through it, even accept direct-deposit from your job. Until you can get a credit card, the Bluebird American Express card is a better option for you than your bank-issued debit card.

Getting a credit card should be a goal of yours, and not just for the better fraud protection it offers over a debit card. Credit cards are the best way to build (or rebuild) your credit right out of prison.

If you did more than seven years in prison, or if it's been more than seven years since you last used any type of credit, your credit history, with some exceptions, has been wiped clean. So if you had a bad history with managing money and credit cards, you can take some comfort in knowing you will start with a clean slate. That means your credit score is the equivalent of zero, and nobody is going to issue you a traditional credit card with a zero credit score. The good news is that a zero credit score is actually better than, say, a 450 credit score. Space doesn't allow us to explain everything you need to know about credit scores, but here are the basics:

Everyone has a credit score, and that score can range from zero to 850.

Your credit score is based on five factors, including your payment history (do you pay your credit bills on time?), how much of your available credit you use each month and how much total credit you have available

to use. Algorithms examine all of these factors and provide lenders with a credit score and report anytime you apply for a credit card or loan.

To borrow our example, 500 is a bad credit score because it shows that the person hasn't managed his credit very well, which makes him a high risk for lenders, while someone with an 850 credit score is low-risk.

A credit score of zero simply means that you are an unknown risk. Teenagers have zero credit scores. People with zero credit scores are actually in a better position than those with mid-range credit scores because it is much easier to build your credit from zero than it is to rebuild it from 500.

You can check your credit score for free at annualcreditreport.com. There are also several money management apps, such as Credit Karma and NerdWallet, that provide you with free access to your credit report and credit score.

So how do you get a credit card with a zero credit score? We suggest you apply for a secured credit card. A secured credit card is different from a traditional credit card in one major way: When a credit card is "secured," it means money must be deposited with the credit card issuer in order to open an account. That money is known as a security deposit. And it's held by the credit card issuer while the account is open, similar to the security deposit given to a landlord to rent an apartment. Whatever amount of money you put down to open the account becomes your credit limit. You can then use your secured credit card just like a traditional credit card. Now, if you're reading this and thinking it doesn't sound much different than a Bluebird American Express debit card, there is one critical difference.

Bluebird doesn't report your activity to the credit bureaus, the organizations that generate your credit score, so it's of no use to you when it comes to building (or rebuilding) your credit. Remember, your credit score is based solely on how you manage your credit, so if you act responsibly with a credit card, even a secured one, your credit score will improve over time.

And the good news is most people who have a job, regardless of their credit score, will qualify for a secured credit card. In our opinion one of the best secured credit cards on the market is the Capital One Platinum Secured Credit Card (capitalone.com). Not only is it with a well-established and reputable bank, there are no monthly fees.

This is extremely important! We urge that you never get a credit card that comes with an annual fee (again, why pay someone for the privilege of giving them your money?), but this is especially true for your very first credit card. Why? Because the length of your credit history plays a huge role in your credit score, which means you never want to close

your oldest credit card account. So if your oldest credit card account comes with monthly fees, you'll be paying that fee for the rest of your life and throwing all that money down the drain.

Is it really that important to improve your credit score? It is if you ever plan to buy a home, get a car, get auto insurance, finance a loan—get the picture? Yes, you need to build your credit score. Many of us got out of prison with a zero credit score and rebuilt it within a year to 730 and higher by using credit cards responsibly. There are many free online resources for understanding your credit score and rebuilding your credit using credit cards. Here are some we highly recommend:

- Clark Howard clark.com
- NerdWallet nerdwallet.com
- Credit Karma creditkarma.com
- Experian experian.com

If you would like one-on-one assistance understanding your credit score and how to increase it, OurJourney strongly recommends contacting OperationHope, which is listed in your Reentry Resource Guide under Financial Resources. The personal help they provide is professional and free.

Important State Income Tax Refund Information!

Many formerly incarcerated individuals are receiving a “Notice of Claim to Income Tax Refund” from the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts and/or a “Notice of Individual Income Tax Adjustment” from the North Carolina Department of Revenue. They’re receiving these notices after filing their federal and state income tax information for the previous year of employment.

The notices read in part: “The Administrative Office of the Courts has intercepted your State Income Tax Refund under the North Carolina Setoff Debt Collection Act, Chapter 105A of the General Statutes. The refund will be applied to the attorney fee judgments or other debts owed to the State of North Carolina listed below.”

Essentially, this means that the State is requiring the individuals who receive these notices to pay back the attorney fees related to the public defenders they had represent them during their criminal cases, plus the interest that has accumulated since the final resolutions of these cases. This may seem unlawful to you, as it does to us, but it is legal under the current statutes in North Carolina.

What this means is that if you receive these notices, the State will continue to withhold your state income tax refunds (assuming you’re due a refund) until the entire amount of the debt has been paid, which could range anywhere from a few hundred dollars to thousands. (One former-

ly incarcerated individual has a debt of \$36,000.00.) You won't know what your debt is until you call the number provided on the notice.

If you agree to pay back all of the original public defender fees, the State will waive the interest, which can be substantial, meaning you won't have to pay the interest.

Please note: This ONLY affects the North Carolina State Income Tax Refund and will not affect any Federal Income Tax Refund. If you're eligible to receive a Federal Income Tax Refund, you'll receive it even if you owe public defender fees.



CLOTHING

You received an OurJourney t-shirt as part of your First Aid Reentry Kit, but obviously you'll need more clothing than just that. The first trip into town after your release will most likely be to purchase clothes, and for good reason. Everybody who's ever done time can't wait until they no longer have to wear state-issued clothes. Sometimes, however, you don't have a lot of money to spend on anything coming right out of prison, clothes included.

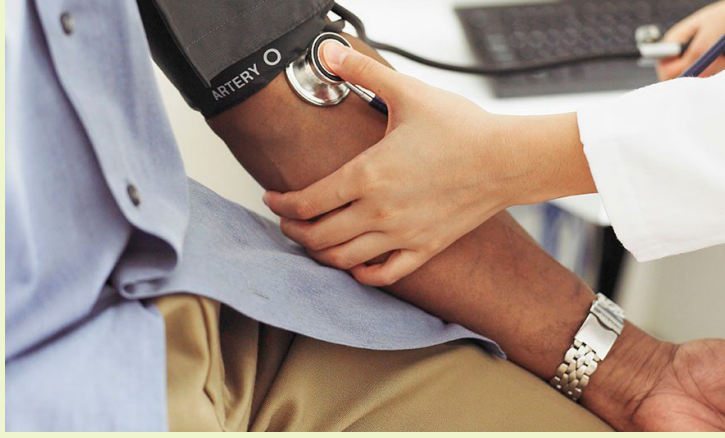
The best place to get good clothes at cheap prices is a Goodwill Thrift Store. There are Goodwills in nearly every city in North Carolina. Goodwill accepts donations from people in the community, then sells those donations (mostly clothes, but other items too) at prices you'll never see even at Walmart. You can often find name-brand clothes and they offer a wide variety of styles and sizes. It is highly likely that you can purchase three or four complete outfits from Goodwill with your \$45 gate check (assuming you're qualified to receive one).

In addition to Goodwill, your local Salvation Army is an excellent place to go for assistance obtaining clothing, as they offer vouchers. Some Salvation Army locations even have \$1 Fridays and Saturdays, where items with the sale color for the week are just a dollar, and many will provide you with a voucher for free clothes if you let them know when you arrive that you've recently been released from prison.

Many cities have other thrift stores where you can buy clothes at a reduced price. Just check your Reentry Resource Guide for clothing information for your county.

Besides thrift stores, there are nonprofit organizations that exist solely for the purpose of providing clothes to those in need, such as Jails To Jobs (jailstojobs.com).

If you still need clothes after trying each of these places, call Our Journey at 252-220-9515. We may be able to help, depending on your location.



MEDICAL NEEDS

Chances are you didn't leave prison with healthcare coverage. This can be a problem if you have a chronic disease like hypertension or get in an accident after your release. Many employers offer healthcare coverage as a benefit, but even if you're lucky enough to land a job at such a company, what do you do in the meantime? Here are some suggestions:

You can enroll for free healthcare insurance through a special program called G.I.F.T. offered by Parks Insurance, a partner of OurJourney's. Parks Insurance is based in South Carolina but is certified to provide insurance coverage in all 50 states. G.I.F.T. (Giving Insurance Freely for Transition) is specifically designed for men and women coming out of prison. There are ZERO monthly premiums for this healthcare insurance and many people returning after incarceration will not even have to pay deductibles for services.

What does G.I.F.T. cover?

It covers your doctor visits, medication, mental health, substance abuse treatment, surgery, nursing home coverage and hospice care. It also covers pre-existing conditions such as diabetes.

What doesn't G.I.F.T. cover?

It doesn't cover dental or vision, but you can have the added for a nominal monthly fee.

It sounds to good to be true. How is it available without a monthly premium?

This program is available as part of the updated Affordable Care Act. The subsidies were permanently increased because of Covid, meaning that many people, including those coming right out of prison, are eligible. Once you start earning above a certain amount yearly, however, you may have to pay a monthly premium. If you use Parks Insurance for your medical insurance, be sure to keep them updated on your annual income.

How do I enroll?

You can enroll by going to www.parksinsured.com. Click on Apply for Free Healthcare Insurance and then click on G.I.F.T Insurance Information Form. You'll need to provide all of the required information. Your insurance card should arrive between 2 and 4 weeks.

You can also enroll by filling out the G.I.F.T Insurance Information Form that OurJourney included inside your First Aid Reentry Kit and mailing it to the following address:

153 S. Oakland Ave.
Rock Hill, SC 29730

OurJourney can also help you enroll as part of our Essential Services program (see page 13 for more details on this program.)

You may also be eligible for assistance through a program called the Formerly Incarcerated Transition program here in North Carolina, also called NC FIT. NC FIT operates in several North Carolina counties with plans to expand across the state. Sponsored by UNC Family Medicine, NC FIT connects formerly incarcerated individuals who have a chronic disease, mental illness and/or substance use disorder with appropriate healthcare services and other reentry resources at no charge to the former prisoner (up to certain levels). To learn more about NC FIT and see if the program is available in your area, go to ncfitprogram.org.

If you need medication refilled before you're able to get insurance or the assistance of NC FIT (for those who live in NC FIT counties), there is another OurJourney partner that we highly recommend. NC MedAssist is the state's only free pharmacy program. You can enroll without a prescription, but you will need to provide NC MedAssist with a current prescription for all medication you need before they can send you your free medication.

To qualify you must:

- Live in North Carolina
- Be uninsured with no access to Medicaid, Medicare, VA insurance or private insurance. (Medicaid patients with family planning only and Medicare patients in the Part D coverage gap are still eligible.)
- Income at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. (Nearly

everyone coming out of prison meets this qualification.)

To enroll, visit their website at www.medassist.org/how-to-enroll. OurJourney can also help you enroll as part of our Essential Services program (see page 13 for more details on this program.)

If you leave prison with a chronic condition, the prison's medical staff are required to give you enough medication to last for one month. If you run out of your supply before you can get the prescription renewed by a free-world doctor, and you don't live in a NC FIT county of operation, go to your nearest Urgent Care facility with the most recent bottle of your medication and explain your need. Urgent Care won't fill the prescription free of charge, but they might fill it without a renewed prescription from a free-world doctor and possibly at a reduced rate. This is not a long term solution, of course, but it can help you in a medical emergency.

You should also refer to your Reentry Resource Guide for healthcare information for your county.



STAYING ALIVE IN THE AGE OF FENTANYL

The biggest challenge for many people returning from prison isn't connecting with family, finding a job or even finding a place to live. The biggest challenge is staying alive.

Did you know that men returning from prison in North Carolina are 40 to 50 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose than other North Carolina citizens? Think about that for a moment: for every one non-justice involved person in this state who dies of an opioid overdose, 40 to 50 formerly incarcerated men die for that same reason. And, sadly, this number keeps going higher every year. Indeed, some studies put the number closer to 100 times more likely.

You cannot rebuild your life from the grave.

Many people who've never been to prison assume that people who enter prison with drug addiction issues leave prison sober. We (and you) know that is rarely true. There isn't a single prison in North Carolina where drugs aren't available, nor do prison drug programs (such as NA or DART) always prepare men to overcome the temptation to do drugs upon release.

And that temptation is strong. Let's consider why...

Life after release is challenging. No matter how much help you receive, things will happen that hit you in the gut like a sucker punch. During those moments, it's so easy to revert back to whatever it was that you used to depend on to help with depression. For those with drug addiction issues, that can be weed or a shot of heroin, perhaps even a pill.

Or maybe the temptation is strong because drugs are so prevalent in freedom. Yes, drugs are available in prison, but not at the level they are in freedom or, perhaps, in your own household. It's not easy saying no when everybody around you is doing something you used to do with them.

Here's the problem. Prison drugs, as harmful as they can be, aren't the same as free-world drugs. Suboxone, which is legal when prescribed by a doctor but illegal otherwise, isn't the same as heroin. K2, which may be the strangest brew of man-made psychoactive herbs in the history of narcotics, still isn't as potentially deadly as Oxycodone. If you did drugs while you were locked up, the chances are that nothing you took was 40 to 50 times more likely to kill you.

Fentanyl changed the game and is the Number One reason for the opioid overdose crisis among our community of returning citizens.

But what is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that's approximately 100 times more powerful than morphine, the substance to which heroin metabolizes, and is commonly used as an end-of-life sedative or during operational anesthesia. In other words, fentanyl, when used properly and under the direction of a doctor, is a compassionate way to ease someone's pain.

Illicit fentanyl, which kills not helps, is often visually indistinguishable by law enforcement. It appears in fake tablets, pills, and gel capsules attempting to mimic certain prescription drugs. Illegal drug manufacturers mix fentanyl with heroin, cocaine and now even marijuana, knowing full well that it only takes a very small dose of fentanyl, between 2 and 3 milligrams, to be lethal. By comparison, a sweetener packet found on a restaurant tabletop generally contains 1,000 milligrams per packet.

People who use drugs, law enforcement officers, first responders, or family members who are unaware of its presence or lethality can be inadvertently exposed to fentanyl, and even exposure can result in death.

"What makes fentanyl so dangerous, something we don't talk about enough," according to Morgan Godvin, the formerly incarcerated and formerly addicted founder of Beats Overdose, a nonprofit organization working to prevent opioid overdose, "is it almost immediately leaves the addict despairing for more. Whereas a straight heroine addict can go as long as 12 to 16 hours between hits, you have to feed a fentanyl addiction as often as every 90 minutes."

Making it even worse for the person who uses drugs returning after incarceration, even if it's only been a few months since he went to prison, is that his body can't consume drugs at the same rate it did before his arrest. His tolerance level has decreased dramatically. Not realizing this, he jumps back in headfirst into a drug world that changes every week,

because of the increased potency and presence of fentanyl, and his body simply cannot handle it.

Let's say it again: You cannot rebuild your life from the grave.

If you use drugs, don't be naive enough to believe you can beat the odds. And even if somehow you do manage to stay alive, drug addiction using drug will make everything else about your reentry more difficult, from keeping a job to enjoying your children, from keeping your driver's license to maintaining a place to live. Get help!

If you received an OurJourney First Aid Reentry Kit, it may have come with two doses of Narcan. Narcan has been approved by the FDA to reverse an opioid overdose. You can't self-medicate Narcan, however, but someone nearby can use it to save your life if you overdose or you may be able to use it so save someone else's life. If you received a First Aid Reentry Kit that didn't include Narcan, you may be able to get it free of charge from your local health clinic, pharmacy or syringe service program. If for some reason you can't locate Narcan in your area, call OurJourney at 252-220-9516 and we'll help you find some. North Carolina law says that you cannot be arrested for requesting Narcan for yourself or on behalf of someone else.

Narcan is a powerful tool, but it won't help you overcome the challenges that result from using drugs. If you used drugs before or during your incarceration, OurJourney strongly encourages you to reach out on Day One of your release to organizations created specifically for the purpose of helping you overcome addiction. These organizations have peer-support specialists who know what it's like and can help you on your path to sobriety.

You can find these organizations in nearly every North Carolina county, but we also suggest that you go to the website of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Their website has links for finding local treatment and crisis help lines, as well as other resources to help you on your path to sobriety. Their web address is www.samsha.gov.

Celebrate Recovery is a Christian-based approach to help bring sustainable recovery and healing to those with drug addictions or any other form of negative addiction. It has a very high success rate for those who commit to the program. To find out if there is a Celebrate Recovery at a church in your area, visit <https://locator.crgroups.info/>.

You may also receive help from the Alcohol/Drug Council of North Carolina by visiting their website at www.alcoholdrughelp.org/.

You can check to see if your county health department offers Narcan or other forms of naloxone by visiting:

www.naloxonesaves.org/where-can-i-get-naloxone/north-carolina-health-departments-that-offer-naloxone/

You can check to see if there is a needle exchange program near you by visiting:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative>

And finally, remember that you can dial 988 at anytime, day or night, if you're tempted to use drugs or already have.

You're not alone. Help without judgement is available.



SPECIAL SECTION FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF SEX OFFENSES

It is important for anyone convicted of a sex offense to be prepared for the public to react differently, perhaps even irrationally, towards you upon your release. If that's you, you may encounter problems finding housing, even temporary housing, getting a job and even, as we discuss in this booklet, doing something as simple as donating plasma. The laws in North Carolina and the United States make it much easier (and legal) for people and businesses to discriminate against sex offenders, particularly those on the state sex offender registry. Here are some key things you should know:

First and most importantly, if your parole officer informs you that you need to register on the North Carolina Sex Offender Registry, you **MUST** do so within 72 hours of your release from prison by going to your local Sheriff's Office.

If you decide to move to another residence, you **MUST** contact the Sheriff's Office **BEFORE** you move. The Sheriff's Office will determine if your new residence is acceptable according to the restrictions imposed by law. Do **NOT** wait until after you've moved to notify the Sheriff's Office.

From 1 to 2 times a year you will receive notification from the Sheriff's Office by certified mail that you need to report to the Sheriff's Office to verify your registration. You **MUST** do this even if you still live at the same location. It's **YOUR** responsibility to know when these dates are! Failure of the notice to arrive does **NOT** remove your requirement to

verify your registration.

The United States Supreme Court ruled in 2017 that the government of North Carolina (and all other states) couldn't ban registered sex offenders from having social media accounts. However, the social media sites themselves can ban registered sex offenders from having active accounts. Indeed, most do, including Facebook. There is no legal recourse if a social media site prohibits you from having an account. If you are permitted by a social media platform to have an account, you **MUST** disclose to the Sheriff's Office your identifiers, such as your profile name.

In North Carolina being on a social media site that bans sex offenders (Facebook) is a felony! Check the terms of use for each site. Facebook actually bans anyone ever convicted of a sex offense. Even after you get off the registry, you still cannot use Facebook.

There are other ways the public can discriminate against you if you've been convicted of a sex offense, but you should never forget that you still have most of the same rights afforded to other citizens in this state. If you feel you've been illegally discriminated against, we suggest you reach out to the National Association for Rational Sex Offense Laws (NARSOL). There is an affiliate of NARSOL here in North Carolina. You may reach NC NARSOL by calling 919-780-4510 or by email at contact@ncrsol.org.

Now for some good news for those with sex convictions: Just as most people will never know you were incarcerated unless you tell them, most people will never know you were incarcerated for a sex offense unless you tell them. Yes, your information, including your address, will be available for anyone to discover on the state sex offender registry, and yes, anyone who conducts a background check on you will know the details of your arrest and conviction. However, most people simply do not have the time or inclination to Google you, so unless you do or say something in public that raises questions or concerns you will encounter very little, if any, open discrimination by people in the public, coworkers or neighbors.

Even better news: you're not alone. NARSOL sponsors an online support group called Fearless. From the NARSOL website:

In September of 2016, NARSOL launched a project with the goal of creating dynamic, self-sustaining support groups around the country, specifically for registered citizens and their adult family members and closest friends who are impacted by our draconian sexual offense laws.

These groups are much MORE than support groups, however. Their goal is two-fold: first, to provide a strong community for persons who find themselves marginalized and ostracized by our society at large, bringing hope and empowerment and, second, to educate group members on such wide-ranging topics as advocacy, self-improvement, and civil rights.

The ultimate goal is to empower registrants and their loved ones to succeed in spite of our society's restraints so that they may become a part of the solution. Meetings contain two key components: a presentation of some sort that will inspire and educate Fearless members and a sharing/discussion component where members can apply what they have heard, connect with one another, and build community.

Don't feel like you're alone. Reach out for support. Take responsibility for yourself, ask for help when you need it, offer help when you have it.

- Fearless-NC Contact info: contact@narsol.org
- <https://narsol.org/projects/support/fearless/>



SPIRITUAL NEEDS

OurJourney is not a religious organization. However, we are founded by former prisoners who believe in the power of God to rebuild lives. We urge you not to neglect your spiritual life upon your release. If you would like to discuss specific spiritual needs, please call OurJourney at 252-220-9516 or email us at info@ourjourney2gether.org. We have a Christian minister on our team who will pray with you and give you godly counsel.

CONTACT NAMES AND NUMBERS

Several of us want to make ourselves available to you for further advice and encouragement. Our first names and phone numbers are listed below. Whenever you get overwhelmed or discouraged, or need advice about specific issues, you may call any of the guys listed. (Please do not call asking for legal or financial aid.) Many of us do not answer our phones when we don't recognize the caller, so you might want to text first or leave a message and we'll call you back. You may be on your own personal journey, but you're also part of OurJourney.

- Tate 980-925-0628
- Brian 336-209-3346
- Dwayne 704-467-3707
- Corey 336-985-6007
- Josh 980-699-8845
- Willie 252-886-0523
- James 336-590-2800
- Lee 252-290-9612
- Lewis 828-228-4598
- Justin 252-903-9178
- Sam 919-437-0487
- James 252-822-2047
- Eli 919-437-2793
- Josh 336-963-9719
- Robert 980-275-9488



ourjourney2gether.org

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