

Unlock the Door to Re-Entry: How We Can Support Homecoming

by EAST BAY FAITH LEADERS

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Terri Brown opens her home to KC Matthews, who was recently released from prison. Since his release, KC has obtained his Social Security and California ID card, found a job as a maintenance worker for a housing nonprofit in Oakland, and is taking classes and preparing to get his drivers license.

Thousands of people leave prison each year in California, eager to rejoin their families and ready to become productive, engaged members of our communities.

The transition from confinement is a demanding process; returning people need help getting back on their feet. Access to a safe and reliable place to live is one of the most basic and important things a person needs to ensure

successful re-entry. But the prospect of securing housing is extremely difficult due to the nationwide housing crisis that is especially drastic in the Bay Area.

Here in the East Bay, the cost of housing has increased so dramatically for both owners and renters that thousands of people are at very high risk for displacement. People leaving prison, especially those having served lengthy sentences, come home with no financial support, which leaves them even more vulnerable to homelessness and re-incarceration. A recent study shows people who have been to prison once experience homelessness almost seven times more than the general public.

At the same time, there are lots of “hidden” housing assets in our midst. Many homes have an extra bedroom, den, or room that can be offered as a safe and reliable place to live for someone re-entering the community.

Our faith traditions teach believers it is our duty to reach out and help others, especially those who have fallen along the way, providing what we can when we can. With this in mind, we urge homeowners in our community to make a difference to those coming home, and help strengthen our community by participating in the new Homecoming Project sponsored by Impact Justice, a national innovation and research center headquartered in Oakland.

The Homecoming Project is an innovative pilot program that taps into underutilized housing resources in Alameda County. Just as Airbnb enables people to monetize their extra living spaces, the Homecoming Project provides subsidies to homeowners in exchange for renting an extra room to people returning home from lengthy prison terms.

The project empowers hosts and returnees through a strong screening and matching process and by offering ongoing support services including communications, problem solving, decision-making, and collaboration skills coaching. It sets clear rules and expectations for all, ensuring a successful re-entry and inspiring relationship with positive outcomes.

Both hosts and returnees benefit from the program. Hosts enjoy additional income while helping to rebuild lives, reunite families, and strengthen communities. Returnees gain a safe and stable environment to live in, greatly increasing their chances of obtaining employment, gaining new skills, and reducing the likelihood of returning to prison. In addition, our communities will see reductions in homelessness and increases in public safety.

Promoting and practicing repentance, redemption, and reconciliation are tangible examples of faith at work in ways that truly matter.

A home is a key to our common humanity. Help unlock the door for returning men and women. Support the Homecoming Project of Impact Justice. Please contact Terah Lawyer at homecomingproject@impactjustice.org.

Signed,

Dr. Jim Hopkins, Pastor, Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church; Bishop Bob Jackson, Senior Pastor, Acts Full Gospel Church of God in Christ; Rabbi Michael Lerner, Editor, Tikkun Magazine, Chair, Network of Spiritual Progressives, Rabbi, Beyt Tikkun Synagogue; Rev. Robert A. Wilkins, Sr., Vice-Chair Board of Trustees Graduate Theological Union and American Baptist Seminary of the West.