



Breaking the Cycle: Reentry, Resilience, and the Power of Care

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Through housing, jobs, and trauma-informed care, systems shift from punishment to possibility, and formerly incarcerated Black Angelenos can rebuild their lives with dignity and belonging.



County of Los Angeles
**Anti-Racism,
Diversity,
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From Incarceration to a New Beginning

Black Angelenos remain vastly overrepresented among both the incarcerated and unhoused populations in Los Angeles County. This disproportionality stems from generations of systemic racism in housing, education, and the criminal legal system. Korey Harvey's story shows what is possible when systems move from punishment to care.

After nearly 13 years of incarceration, Korey Harvey was released from prison on December 1, 2023. With the world he returned to feeling both familiar and foreign, he entered transitional housing with little support and no safety net, revealing how systems often fail to provide the resources needed for successful reentry.

"I had to grind," Harvey recalled. "I didn't have many people to count on... I was the main player in my whole transformation."

Like many formerly incarcerated folks, Harvey faced an uphill battle. Even acquiring basic documents — like a birth certificate or Social Security card — was a challenge. "Getting them things is a struggle because you need identification to get identification," he said.

Housing and Hope

In Los Angeles County, housing remains one of the most pressing needs for returning citizens. JCOD addresses this head-on through programs that offer two years of rental assistance, case management, and employment support.

These services are designed to help people returning home from incarceration gradually gain stability and achieve independence within two years.

"We help pay for your housing, and we give you two years to become completely self-sufficient," said Judge Armstead. This provides rental assistance and housing support for up to two years, creating the breathing room needed for people to stabilize, reconnect with family, and work toward long-term independence.

The department also invests in career-building, not just job and housing placements. With partners like Cal Fire and West Coast Customs, JCOD helps participants secure certifications in high-skill industries such as firefighting, construction, and auto repair. Initiatives like the Firefighter Training Program and an auto repair career pathway developed with West Coast Customs offer individuals hands-on training and mentorship to access long-term employment and stability.

"People say, 'They can do janitorial work,'" Armstead said. "But these folks are capable of aerospace."

A Department Rooted in Care

While deeply personal, Harvey's journey mirrors the systemic gaps that disproportionately impact Black Angelenos returning home after incarceration. Black people make up about 30% of Los Angeles County's unhoused population, despite representing only 8% to 9% of the general population, according to the [Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority and the County's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative](#). Statewide, about one in five people experiencing homelessness said they had been incarcerated in the six months before becoming homeless, according to a [2023 University of California, San Francisco study](#). It's these very gaps that the Los Angeles County Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD) was created to address.



Launched in 2022 and led by former judge Songhai Armstead, JCOD is rooted in a transformative vision: to reduce incarceration and homelessness by providing people with the care, resources, and opportunities they need to thrive.

“Our goal is really to not have anyone be incarcerated,” said Judge Armstead. “We support folks in the community through prevention, diversionary entry services — everything from housing, workforce development, case management.”

Under Judge Armstead’s leadership, JCOD has grown from a five-person team to a department of over 130 staff and contractors. It now operates a 7-day-a-week call center, provides rides from jail to emergency housing, and offers diversion programs, mental health support, and job training.

“All of our work is based on trauma-informed care,” she said. “All of our providers go through trauma-informed care and they also go through cognitive behavioral trainings.”

Transforming Through SECTOR

Harvey received that kind of support through the Center for Living and Learning, where he joined the SECTOR program, a workforce readiness and healing-centered initiative supported by JCOD.

A standout for him was a class called CBI, or Cognitive Behavioral Intervention. With a focus on increasing positive behaviors and promoting self-control, Harvey describes the class as “a class that pretty much has you think about your thinking.”

Even with new tools and resources, finding employment proved difficult.

“I’d been on like eight job interviews,” he said. “I don’t know if it was from nerves... gaps in my resume... but I never got a call back.” He reached out directly after connecting with a speaker at a reentry meeting: “I’m desperate. I could get the job done. I just need to be hired.”

Hired by Hope the Mission, Harvey’s goal in his new role was to give back to people, and he was eventually promoted to a case manager. “It was like my desire to give back and to help people,” he said. “So both of them things kind of connected.”

A Countywide Commitment to Justice and Racial Equity

JCOD’s work is part of a broader, coordinated effort to eliminate structural racism in Los Angeles County. In 2020, the Board of Supervisors launched the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative — charging it with implementing a countywide anti-racism policy agenda. This work sits at the intersection of the County’s homelessness response and racial equity initiatives. Because incarceration is one of the strongest predictors of homelessness, particularly for Black residents, the County’s investments through JCOD address one of the root causes of housing instability.”

As part of this effort, ARDI and the Black People Experiencing Homelessness (BPEH) Implementation Steering Committee issued recommendations to address racial disparities in homelessness and the criminal legal system. Among their top priorities: expanding trauma-informed reentry services, funding community-based providers, and delivering culturally relevant systems of care.

JCOD’s programs — including SECTOR, housing stipends, and transitional employment — bring these recommendations to life.

ARDI plays a key role in aligning these initiatives across departments, tracking implementation, and ensuring investments are made through a racial equity lens.

The collaboration between ARDI, JCOD, and non-profit partnerships is a powerful example of how strategy, accountability, and community can drive structural change.

A Full Spectrum of Support Leads to Stability

The journey to stable housing isn’t just about securing a roof over one’s head — it’s about rebuilding a life in a system that was not designed to support healing or success after incarceration. That’s why economic and social supports must go hand in hand.

Employment alone doesn’t solve housing insecurity, but when paired with trauma-informed care, mentorship, transportation, and personal development, it creates a foundation for people to thrive. Programs like SECTOR don’t just provide job readiness — they help individuals reflect, grow, and reconnect with their values.

By supporting people holistically, the County is helping create the conditions for long-term housing stability. When someone has a job that affirms their dignity, a community that encourages their healing, and a safety net that recognizes the barriers they face, the path to permanent housing becomes clearer — and more achievable.

Harvey’s experience reflects this approach. Employment gave him purpose. SECTOR gave him tools. Rental assistance gave him breathing room. All of it helped him reclaim his life on his own terms.

Rewriting the Narrative

Public perception remains one of the biggest barriers.

Judge Armstead believes that reshaping the narrative around reentry is key to building a safer, more just Los Angeles.

“Everyone returns to community,” she said. “Safer communities are when everyone is able to step into whatever their potential is and feel that they have value to add.” Communities are safest when every person returning home is supported to realize their potential and affirmed in their value.

Harvey agrees. His growth came not just from the programs available to him, but from learning to believe in his own worth.

“I started to finally turn that mirror inward and realize that, hey, I have to first be comfortable with myself,” he said.

As JCOD grows, Armstead hopes the name becomes more than just an acronym — she wants it to become a verb.

“You Googled it. You Ubered it. Now you JCOD it,” she said. “That means you got support. You got care. You got a second chance.”

Rooted in Repair and Growing into Systems of Care

Harvey’s story is not just one of personal resilience — it’s proof of what happens when systems invest in healing and equity instead of punishment.

It also shows how equitable housing and workforce investments can break the link between incarceration and homelessness.

Through partnerships, policy leadership, and trauma-informed programs, Los Angeles County is beginning to repair the harm caused by decades of racial inequity in incarceration and housing.

This is the work ARDI, JCOD, and its partners have built to steward: confronting and undoing



the racial disparities embedded in our systems and ensuring that Black residents — who are disproportionately impacted by incarceration and homelessness — are no longer left behind. By funding programs that support healing, accountability, and purpose, ARDI, JCOD, and its partners are co-creating new pathways to dignity, stability, and justice.

Housing and healing-centered reentry aren't special programs: they are the foundation of racial equity and public safety. When people have stable housing, meaningful work, and access to trauma-informed care, they are far less likely to return to incarceration and far more likely to contribute to thriving communities. This approach shifts the County's focus from punishment to prevention, recognizing that true safety grows from stability, dignity, and belonging.

"All of our work is centered on building systems that care," said Judge Armstead. "We want people to see that they matter, that they have potential, and that they deserve support."

Acknowledgements

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When paired with housing support and trauma-informed care, employment does more than generate income. It's a vehicle for identity, dignity, purpose, and belonging.

For people navigating reentry, especially Black Angelenos, a job can be the difference between surviving and thriving and a critical step toward permanent housing.

Harvey's journey reflects this truth. His growth didn't come from punishment — it came from purpose. "It was like my desire to give back and to help people," he said. "So both of them things kind of connected."

The ripple effects of this work go beyond any one department, organization, or program. They live in the stories of people like Harvey: people who just needed someone to believe in them, and a system that finally made space for them to succeed.



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