



Feature One

The Mission of Regaining Freedom: In Conversation with ARC Executive Director Shaka Senghor

Nic Reiner, Director of Communications at ARC, interviews Shaka Senghor, the new Executive Director of ARC, about what 2019 will look like for those who have come home and those who are still inside.

NR: One of the things we're thinking about as the year turns is advancement or renewal. What do those words mean to you?

SS: I'm really excited about the new year. I've been here at ARC officially 6 months. The first six months were really incredible and I got the chance to meet a lot of people who support the work of ARC. I've also had the opportunity to go into several of the prisons and juvenile detention centers to meet many of our members on the inside. When I think about advancement, my focus is on deepening those relationships with members inside, ensuring the programs we run have further reach than they've had in prior years. And making sure our connectivity remains consistent, whether through the newsletter, our inreach program, or through the letter-writing program.

NR: What are some of the prisons you've visited?

SS: I've visited Lancaster, I've been in CIW, Sylmar Juvenile Hall, in addition to Corcoran during the Common tour. I've been to San Quentin multiple times during my time in California.

NR: You had experience in Michigan corrections. Did you go inside in Michigan after coming out?

SS: When I was back home, I had the opportunity to go inside prisons to speak a couple of times. One was actually across the

street from where I served time, which was very emotionally challenging knowing I was going to go in and see some of my friends who weren't coming home with me. Then I had an opportunity to go speak to some young men in a prison not far from where I came home in Detroit. I definitely look forward to etting back out and spending time in those prisons with some of my friends. But my priority right now is building relationships inside prisons in California.

NR: What is that like seeing people you know and just being in the physical place again?

SS: It's always difficult, going back inside any type of institution, whether it's the sounds or the smells. There are always things that trigger the bad memories of being inside prison. The positive thing about going inside is to be able to fellowship with men and women and be able to share with them what we're doing out here, give them a shot in the arm to get through the next day. It's one of the reasons I took this job, to directly impact people who are still on the inside, make sure that we're living our lives out here in a way that honors their mission of regaining freedom. Anytime I can go and talk to men and women on the inside who are trying to do the right thing, who want to be on the right thing, who want to be on the right path, who want to come home, who are programming, it's a great day for me despite the triggers of going back. Moving forward into 2019, I look forward to going inside even more.

NR: Is there anything folks have told you on these visits that have been particularly striking?

SS: I hear men and women say they received the newsletter, seeing us out here representing for them and being a reflection of them. That's some of the greatest feedback we've received so far. Anytime I go in and somebody recognizes the hard work and dedication of our staff it's a blessing because many of our staff members have been inside those prisons. For their colleagues and peers to see them out here living their lives, thriving, but also doing work that has meaning and value--there's nothing like that feeling of going back inside and having that experience.

NR: You're someone who speaks to large audiences. You speak in front of high-profile celebrities, you're in these rooms. Are there particular words you share in these spaces that you feel are related to what you share when you're talking to people inside?

SS: As a speaker, what's really important to me is having human to human connectivity. Oftentimes, we don't think of people who haven't lived our experiences as being relatable. What I've found is, no matter who the audience is, if you walk in with an open heart and you share from your heart, people tend to react very positively and it deepens relationships and connections. As someone who spent time inside, I find there are a lot of people out here who are mentally

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ARC's new Executive Director Shaka Senghor

incarcerated. The same things required to break through the hopelessness in prison is required to do the same out here. Whether it's people who are battling addiction or battling depression, those things are just as true out here as they are in there. What's necessary to turn it around is similar, so I never feel out of place in front of these audiences. I feel like there's more we have in common than things that are different.

NR: What's something fun you've done recently?

SS: Fun is whenever I'm doing something for my son. Just celebrated my son's birthday this past Saturday at Dave and Buster's. That's my definition of fun: being a father and enjoying those day to day moments. For the members inside who have children, it's one of the things I can't wait for you to experience – the fullness of the day to day life of being a father or a mother and being able to share that experience with your child.

NR: As a leader, people look to you for support and guidance. Do you have any advice from that standpoint?

SS: There are a few different things that I want our members to consider when they think about the work we're doing out here. One is that the journey starts with deep self-analysis rooted in honesty and transparency.

If you can't be honest with yourself, you can't be honest with anybody else. Once you can be honest with yourself, life begins to look very different, because you realize what you're responsible for as opposed to what somebody else is responsible for. The second thing I would say is arm yourself with as much information as possible. Reading is the cornerstone of learning and creates different outlooks on life when you expose yourself to information. The last thing is: invest in yourself. We put a lot of our energy, life or effort into other people and we don't think about what we really need or deserve. In order to thrive out here, you have to be willing to invest in yourself and part of that investment in yourself is making the hard decisions, who you want to be around, who you allow to occupy your mental space, who really cares for you and who supports you. We all have to think about those things and that starts with a deep honest look into the self.

NR: In 2019, what are we excited about for ARC, in reentry and inside?

SS: In 2019 we're excited about continuing the policy work that we've done, passing bills and changing laws to bring more of our members home. We're looking forward to growing our organization in chapters and creating

Feature Two New Fire Program at Ventura Training Center: An Interview with Michelle Garcia

In partnership with CAL FIRE, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), California Conservation Corps (CCC), ARC began operations at the new Ventura Training Center (VTC) in October 2018. VTC is home to an enhanced firefighter training and certification program at the Ventura Conservation Camp in Ventura County. VTC Cadets are people on parole who have recently been part of a trained firefighting workforce housed in fire camps or institutional firehouses operated by CAL FIRE and CDCR. VTC provides advanced firefighter training, certifications and job readiness support to create a pathway for formerly incarcerated people to compete for entry-level firefighting jobs with state, federal and local agencies. Michelle Garcia is the Program Coordinator at Ventura Training Center and an ARC member.



What is your experience like working at the Fire Training Center?

MG: It's mind-blowing the full circle of my life. My incarceration in many ways was the worst time of my life. I had never physically worked as hard as I was working in fire camp. Yet, here I am seven years later because of those experiences. To me, that is a gift by itself I don't take lightly. To be able to see the cadets, relate to them, laugh with them, share fire talk, feel their pain—I know what it feels like to be exhausted all day and still have to get up early the next morning. You just bond in the way the rest of the world might not get because you've walked in their boots.

What are some of the things you do day to day?

MG: Every day I wake up with the mindset of making amends for the harm I caused my family and community. This amending also means not taking for granted the trust that ARC, CAL FIRE, CDCR, and CCC put in me. This step of amends also means making those organizations proud. It's doing the best job I can do, and then even a little more. Not just to prove myself, but to take that step for my brothers and sisters inside, because how they are viewed is often influenced by our actions out here.

Did you expect to be in this career after you were incarcerated?

MG: It's way different and fills my heart with tremendous gratitude. I came home and the first six months I didn't know how I was going to make a life after prison. Transitioning back from life as an inmate to a human being was a second

sentence for me. I wasn't prepared and I saw no hope at the end of the tunnel. I was convicted of 33 felonies. Who's going to hire somebody with 33 felonies in an embezzlement case? What was the chance of anyone hiring me? What kind of career could even come from that past?

Still, something in my spirit knew early that I was going to use this experience. I was in the midst of the storm but some way I knew I was going to benefit from it. Where I was on a yard was the same receiving line as death row. When someone walks through, everybody lays on the ground, seeing girls walk by. A piece of my heart walked by, and I thought my calling was going to be helping people on death row. But the idea of it ever happening was such a pipe dream. Look at this mess of my life. How would I ever help somebody else?

Do you have advice for people inside who think about themselves in a future career?

MG: What's different now is that so many of us go back inside. I believe in the years I was down, I heard one person outside share about being incarcerated. Now there are so many programs that involve formerly incarcerated. So many are going back through those doors. Listen to the ones going back, look at their life, ride on the hope. If it can happen for me, it can

happen for you. Look to the pathways of those who have gotten out. My other advice: program, program, program. Get ready and stay ready because you never know what law is going to change, what policy is going to affect you. You may not even know your file is being looked at and your number is going to be called and you're not going to be ready. I encourage folks by saying there's so many people every day on those steps of Sacramento fighting for you that you don't even hear about.

How did your time down influence the way you lead/manage?

MG: What prepared me was my hardship. It gave me compassion and I think I'm a better leader because I know what's it like to be at the bottom. As a leader of this program, I believe that everybody plays an important part. Treat the CEO the same as the janitor. I've been the janitor, and as I work my way to the CEO, I want to leave a path of love and encouragement behind me.

My first position in this field was helping to raise money to put families on a bus for Mothers Day and Fathers Day. To look at my responsibilities now, it's much bigger. Each step has taught me a valuable lesson for where I am today. I know that I like doing what I do, and I know something even bigger is in front of me.

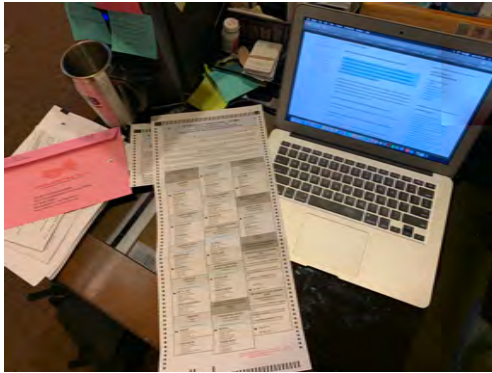


VTC Fire Program Participants.

Feature Three

Fixing the Future: Voter Disenfranchisement and ARC

In November 2018, the United States held midterm elections. Some ARC members were either voting for the first time, had not voted in decades, or are unable to vote. Below are their stories.



Not being able to vote frustrated me. If I must pay taxes, my vote should matter. I did my time but I feel my time is not yet done. Voting would benefit not only me, but my family and my state as well. It's very frustrating being barred from the true normality of life. The time will come for me to vote but how am I supposed to get readjusted to society if I'm always being placed in a certain box? I'm working, I'm paying taxes, and everything a normal person is supposed to be doing, yet I'm barred from so many outlets in our community. Though it frustrates me, I can't sit on it because of everything I have learned. It's better to encourage someone around you to vote than just sit on your anger. I encouraged my wife to go vote and watching her do that gave me the understanding that her vote made a difference. There are a lot of things that are swept under the rug, new laws being enacted, and many don't take the time to check them out.

When we get out, we're all going to have to drive on a bumpy road all the way back home. And that's because of a lack of votes. I want my son to be able to go to a good park and be safe. I want him to be able to cross the street and have that crosswalk be lit up. Those are the little things that matter, and if we can't cast our vote for these situations then it goes deeper than that. I'm a father but I can't even voice my opinion to fix his future, or the future of our country.

-Richard Lopez

Being able to vote is a privilege bestowed upon the citizens of the United States of America, except in certain states where being on parole removes and disenfranchises its system-impacted citizens. In the 1700's there came about a slogan, "No taxation without representation," which was one of the causes of the American Revolution.

I have only voted once in my life. At the time, I was about 20 years old. I could and did not appreciate the value of my vote. As I have matured and studied law and American history, I have come to realize that every vote has the power to create checks and balances. My vote does count. In my restoration towards becoming a pro-social member of society I pay taxes, stay crime free, volunteer hours in my community, and work with at risk youth. Does this allow me to vote for a representative that holds my beliefs? NO! Instead I am ostracized from a Constitutional right that is guaranteed to all citizens within its borders.

How could my vote hurt? Is not an informed vote better than no vote at all? As a pro-social member of society, I am well informed of the issues facing our country and state and have even spoken before Senators and Assemblymembers. Having no vote is like having no voice to protect myself and those around me. Who guards the guards? If I and my formally incarcerated people cannot vote, are we really citizens or just tokens of a country that pushes "progressive reform"?

I was released on October 22, 2015 after serving 18 years and three months. I have worked various jobs to survive and provide a sustainable living for my wife and me. Moreover, since my release I have graduated from college. Was that a requirement of parole? No! It was my requirement to reintegrate back into society. Do I feel like a citizen? NO, once again. Despite my paying taxes and the expectation that I be pro-social, my being denied the right to vote is a form of alienation from my country men and women.

-Aldo Romero, ARC Life Coach

At a very young age I did not fully comprehend what privileges my right to vote entailed. I did not realize how significant and important our right to vote is. Voting is the linchpin of our democratic process. Voting puts people and laws in place that have the ability to deeply affect our lives. Voting is the lifeblood of American society.

Being unable to vote in this past election truly hurt me. I was released from prison after 22 years on April 19, 2018 and this would have been my first opportunity to vote since being

released. I believe in the right to vote and look forward to the day when I will be able to cast my ballot. My ballot may be the one that swings the vote that could decide a critical election or critical law that could deeply affect others.

-Salim Allen

I voted for the first time in my life this year. I was disenfranchised from voting for 35 years.

I'd never voted before. If you vote, you get a say in something. People complain about something, but they don't want to put the work in. When I was free and off parole, I wanted to do everything regular people can do. I wanted to fulfill my social responsibilities. My mom and I went to vote together. People were asking why and she explained that I had got in some trouble young. She showed me how to flip the pages and figure it out. It was great. I'd never even thought about voting, I wanted to be a part of it this year.

-Harvey Knight, ARC Life Coach



In 2019, ARC will begin a campaign to restore the right the vote to Californians on parole. Ideally, this will be the first step in our voting restoration campaign, the ultimate goal of which is to restore the right to vote for all incarcerated people.

Feature Four

“Every Day Is An Opportunity to Learn”: ARC Coding Bootcamp Unveiled

In 2018, ARC launched a computer coding boot camp for formerly incarcerated members, in partnership with Sabio and Youth Policy Institute (YPI). The coding bootcamp is a 14-week pilot program combining life skills development, technical education, and sustained supportive services to prepare formerly incarcerated members to enter the labor market as software engineers.

ARC member Ariel Cook is in the inaugural coding bootcamp and reflects on his experience before and during the bootcamp.



I was fortunate to learn about technology and computers while in prison. I took a course on the fundamentals of writing code and developing software. The idea of learning a programming language was appealing to me. I thought it was a great skill to learn because it would give me the opportunity to establish a career I have a passion for.

The first project I created was a simple calculator. It gave me the confidence to tackle more advanced projects as I progressed through the course. After

completing the course in two years, I took on clerical jobs where I continued to use my skill to build programs to automate tasks.

During the internet boom of the 1990s, I was incarcerated as a young man. I did my best to keep up with technology in prison, but I was many years behind. The internet was not accessible in prison, so the web was not familiar to me. I relied on family and friends to help me navigate and find information on the internet. When I came home, I was unfamiliar with a cell phone. When I received my first phone call from family members I did not know how to accept the call or respond with a text message.

I was thrilled when ARC made it possible for people like me to enroll in the Sabio program. I joined the coding boot camp to continue to sharpen my skills in web development. Technology is a fast-evolving field. I wanted to learn the latest tools in the least amount of time possible. I am learning various technologies for building a full stack application. HTML, CSS, and Javascript (all programming languages) are the core technologies I learned during the early phase of the 14-week program. Currently, I am utilizing a Javascript framework called Reactjs which is a modern technology invented by Facebook for building the user interface.

Understanding code is like learning to speak another language. Once you get a grasp of the basic syntax of the language, things become more difficult as you move forward.



ARC Member Ariel Cook after a coding cohort.

The tech industry moves fast which makes it hard to keep up with the latest tools available. You are faced with a difficult challenge of doubting yourself when others around you know a skill you don't currently possess. I remind myself how much I love coding and every day is an opportunity to learn.

For people still in prison, I encourage you all to take advantage of every educational opportunity available to learn coding. Use your time wisely by reading programming books. Even writing code on a piece of paper will strengthen your knowledge of code.

ARC Receives 2018 Neighborhood Builders Award from Bank of America



In November 2018, ARC received the Neighborhood Builders Award from Bank of America for the work we do to strengthen our communities. The ceremony was held at the California Science Center in the room that holds the Endeavor Space Shuttle. Shaka and Sam Lewis, Director of Inside Programs, gave speeches in accepting the award. ARC members and staff joined.



Feature Five

From the Ashes of the Past, a New Spread Is Reborn

Jose Gonzalez--ARC Member, past ARC staff, and current Warner Bros. employee--tells his story.



These days, I am reminded of the phoenix myth. You know, the bird with brightly colored plumage that looks bad ass, especially on the hood of a Trans-Am. In the legend, after having a long life, it dies in a ball of fire of its own making only to rise again from the ashes, beautiful and reborn. This is such a profound image to ponder during these holidays, my fourth set outside of CDCR.

During my shelfmaking days in the cell, I remember that prison life damaged my perception of the holidays. Somehow, though, the spirit of what the holidays meant was stronger than the environment. Outside of the ugly fact that depression in institutional settings runs high during the holidays, something about the spirit pierced even the loudest of block guns.

A simple and direct approach in a very hopeless environment kept that spirit alive. There always seemed to be someone who would make it a thing to hit people up to pitch in for a spread. Whether to hustle a meal by getting everyone else to pitch in for this holiday inspired feast, or because they actually enjoyed the holidays—this was a way of keeping them connected to the past. A past with some decent memories of youth spent before innocence was lost. Long before trauma-influenced behavior and one began inflicting trauma onto others for the temporary sense of relief. That sense of community found its way through the dismal setting like a blade of grass through concrete.

I truly remember the youth aspect of how I viewed my life, how I viewed my past, and how I normalized my world. It is easier to say now in hindsight as I've taken on my role as an actual adult but I don't feel far from the sixteen-year-old teen I was when I first went in. I can still remember the bags of candy and peanuts they

gave us for Christmas. This of course was a trip since I was never prepared to receive anything festive in prison. But the spreads stood out. All that mayonnaise and salt would make any physician cringe.

The crazy thing is although I am now free I am still pitching in on spreads. They go by a different name out here: they are called "potlucks." Yeah, no shit, all it is to me is a spread with fancier stuff. Maybe them dudes inside were onto something. Something that made life, no matter where you found yourself, just a little better.

I can say this with my still very limited experience living outside the cell, that life does not always go according to plan. Life is wonderful in so many different ways and life sometimes takes a strange route. But no matter how I feel in the moment, I appreciate my ability to look towards the negative. The negative in the sense that I know it could be worse. I remember when it was. This helps me find my grounding when I am faced with the overwhelming fear that at times comes with living a regular life. I mean come on, I am on a movie studio lot, as an employee, this guy who once was assigned to the kitchen crew on C- Yard. I can't help but tap into my inner kid and enjoy the moment. A moment of working every day around the people who tell stories and have told some of the stories that have shaped my life. Working at Warner Bros. has given me an experience I never thought I would have. Few people in general ever experience this, regardless of previous childhood homes and upbringings. These opportunities in life should be appreciated and utilized regardless of the career path.

All modes of employment have these types of opportunities specific to the trade one would want to pursue. Whether you are a construction worker

and they offer an extended math training seminar so that you could one day read and draft blueprints on your way to becoming a contractor. Leadership training for management, directors, and vice presidents that could help you understand how to be an effective and competent supervisor one day. All of these types of opportunities that help you advance in your career and in life, you have to take advantage of them when you can. Every day I learn something new. Sometimes I didn't know I learned it until later when I am asked to complete a certain task and I can accomplish it because I was paying attention while people worked or from a workshop I attended.

I admit my eyes at times may be blinded by the sun that lights my path in life today, at times distracted from my present moment. Yet I never stray too far from the memories and thoughts from my past. I wear figurative shades to view into the past in order to amplify my future.

I am blessed to take my son with me onto the Lot sometimes. I watch him smile up at me just happy to be with me. You know, I think he is an extension of my phoenix. In my descent from grace, I was a twisted ball of fire and the rebirth from the ashes was him. A brand new me ready to take on the world, accompanied by the old burned me to help him navigate. An image that will keep me smiling during this potluck on the lot that I am scheduled to attend. I'll be in a sea of food and studio employees, lost amongst the lot, but you can find me in the crowd with my cool kicks, headphones around my neck, and a huge smile.





ARC ED Shaka Senghor moderating a panel which included ARC member Jose Gonzalez on the topic of reentry.

Criminal Justice Reform Summit

ARC co-hosted the Criminal Justice Reform Summit created by Variety and Rolling Stone in Los Angeles in November 2018.

ARC Executive Director Shaka Senghor moderated a panel and ARC Member Jose Gonzalez and ARC Founder Scott Budnick spoke on panels related to the criminal justice system and reentry. ARC Members were given multiple rounds of applause from the stage and the audience for their work.

The event was held at the Jeremy Hotel in West Hollywood and was presented by The Margaret and Daniel Loeb Foundation and The Joan Ganz Cooney and Holly Peterson Foundation.

Anti-Recidivism Coalition
1320 E. 7th Street
Suite 260
Los Angeles, CA 90021



The mission of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) is to change lives and create safe, healthy, healthy communities by providing a support and advocacy network for and compromised of, formerly incarcerated men and women.

Founded in 2013, with offices in Los Angeles and Sacramento, ARC provides services and support to formerly incarcerated individuals while advocating for fairer criminal justice policies. ARC provides its membership with mentorship, mental health services, supportive housing, access to jobs and education, and opportunities to advocate for criminal justice reform.

Write to the Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Los Angeles: Anti-Recidivism Coalition, 1320 E. 7th Street Suite 260, Los Angeles, CA 90021

Sacramento: Anti-Recidivism Coalition, 1414 K Street, Suite 150, Sacramento, CA 95814

If you write ARC a letter, please include some general information that will assist us in determining how to best serve you, and that will aid ARC with their advocacy efforts. Please answer the following questions:

- Are you serving a determinate sentence, serving a life sentence, or a life without the possibility of parole sentence?
- Do you fall all under SB 934, SB260, SB261, AB 1308, SB 1391, SB 1437, or Prop. 57?
- Have you had a suitability hearing? If so, how many have you had?

Also please keep ARC updated if you happen to transfer out of your current institution. This will ensure you continue to receive the ARC quarterly newsletter.

Learn How You and Your Family Can Get Involved

The bills that ARC and other community-based groups throughout California are supporting this year are significant in that they help provide many of you with chances to return to your families, remove barriers to your employment once you return home, and ensure that young people never enter the juvenile / criminal justice systems.

California legislators need to know that these bills are extremely important to their constituents. One of the ways that you can help these bills become reality is to encourage your families to contact their representatives and voice their support. They can find out who their representatives are by using the following website: findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov

Once they find out who their representatives are, they simply have to contact them and voice their support. Your family members, loved ones and friends can contact their representatives through phone calls and social media, as well.

Please encourage your friends and loved ones today!