

# ROOT & REBOUND

REENTRY ADVOCATES



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# 2022 Annual Report

## Mission

To support people navigating reentry and reduce the harms perpetuated by mass incarceration.

## Values

Dignity, Integrity, Accountability

## Team

Louise Arreguin, *AmeriCorps VISTA Central Valley Communications and Outreach Coordinator*

Briana Barnes, *Assistant to the Executive Director*

Amanda Carlin, *Litigation Staff Attorney*

Deborah Choi, *Youth Justice Staff Attorney*

Victoria Daggett, *Employment Coach*

Katie Decker, *Warm Hand-Off Fellow*

Eva DeLair, *Deputy Director, Northern CA Programs*

Allison Elder, *SC Director of Legal Services*

Jeannine Esposito, *Director of Development & Communications*

Carmen Garcia, *Executive Director*

Lupita Garcia, *Finance & Operations Manager*

Zack Gates, *Fair Chance Data Coordinator*

Zach Gautier-Klos, *CA Policy Attorney*

Anna Gorski, *AmeriCorps VISTA Northern California Communications and Outreach Coordinator*

Claudia Gonzalez, *Central Valley Policy Associate*

Fredrick Green, *Frontline Fellow*  
Veena Gursahani, *Deputy Director Southern CA & Central Valley Programs, Strategic Partnerships and Statewide CA Policy*

Jessica Hallett, *Staff Attorney, Native Communities (CA)*

Daniel Halpern, *Senior Paralegal*

Shirene Hansotia, *Director, R&R in South Carolina*

Stephen Ho, *In-Prison Programs Coordinator*

Annie Holmes, *National Legal Resource Coordinator*

Shannon Hurt, *Operations & Administrative Coordinator*

Nicole Jeong, *Southern California Regional Director of Advocacy*

Joshua Kim, *National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity*

Margaret Laffan, *In-Prison Program Attorney*

Abby Lederman, *Legal Fellow*

Emily Ledford, *Staff Attorney*

Rona Navales, *Development & Communications Coordinator*

Stephanie Ocampo, *Central Valley Policy Fellow*

Misty Oka, *Equal Justice Fellow*

Mona Patel, *Record Cleaning Staff Attorney*

Jamie Popper, *Supervisory Attorney, In-Prison Programs*

Megan Powell, *Staff Attorney*

Kiran Rao, *AmeriCorps VISTA Data Analyst*

John Rodriguez, *Fair Chance Employment Specialist*

Alwin Smith, *Fair Chance Employment Specialist*

Ivet Soria, *Employment Coach*

Cat Snyder, *AmeriCorps VISTA Member Greenville*

Greta Staggs, *AmeriCorps VISTA Southern California Communications and Outreach Coordinator*

Kaylie Stapleton, *Paralegal and Office Manager*

Meera Swanson, *Development Associate*

Sarah True, *Equal Justice Works Fellow*

Jill Webber, *AmeriCorps VISTA Economic Mobility Coach*

Janae Wright, *Frontline & Operations*

Gail Yen, *California Policy Director*

**Thank you to all of our interns, law clerks, volunteers, clients and donors who are invaluable members of our team.**

## Board of Directors & Advisory Board

Melinda Angell

Saeleen Bommarito

Irene Diaz

Carmen Garcia

Sandra Johnson, *Board Chair*

Watani Stiner

Carol Kahm

Aparna Polavarapu

Keith Smalls

Elaina Wolfe

# Dear Friends,

It is with gratitude to all of you that I enter my second year as Executive Director of Root & Rebound. It has been an incredible year of growth for the organization and professionally for me as well.

I am constantly reminded of how fortunate I was to have found this incredible organization. When I was released from prison 11 years ago, I had no idea what would lie ahead as leaving incarceration is a bewildering, overwhelming, confusing and often isolating experience. I didn't know if I would have the resources or support to navigate a different world than the one I left. Then I learned about Root & Rebound whose mission is to support people navigating reentry and reduce the harms perpetuated by mass incarceration. It was within their walls that I found a home and the tools to chart my path.

And our goal is to do just that for all our clients by creating a clear roadmap for reentry success that benefits both formerly incarcerated individuals and society. We offer legal services, policy reform, education, mentorship opportunities, and partnerships with employment, education, and immigration organizations who can provide opportunities and resources that help people never return to prison again.

However, and perhaps maybe most importantly, we focus on personal storytelling – specifically, the stories people tell themselves about what they can and cannot do. This kind of narrative shift that allows people to see themselves – and the world – differently is transformative.

A survey of our clients found that 92% of respondents feel more confident that they'll find a new or better job, while 78% say they've had their income increased thanks to the organization's services. And an incredible 97% feel confident that their story is valuable.

Thank you again for your belief in the power of hope, opportunity, and the potential of everyone who needs a second chance. We are grateful for your continued support of our organization as well as our amazing staff who continue to zealously advocate for people like me to get into positions like the one I am in now.

With Love & Gratitude,



**Carmen Garcia**  
Executive Director





*“Now I have a new start. It’s amazing. You guys are confirmation that I’m on the right track.”*

Jason Chico’s dream was to find ways to give back to children who looked like him and grew up in similar environments – to provide the guidance he craved when he was younger.

A mentor through the California Community Colleges’ Rising Scholars Network recommended that Jason reach out to Root & Rebound’s hotline. After receiving our support he said, “They made me feel like I mattered, like I wasn’t a criminal and your accomplishments mattered.”

Prior to working with resources like Root & Rebound, Jason’s criminal record led to enormous challenges in securing employment. However, his hard work combined with our record cleaning efforts, changed all that; Jason is now working with Project Hope as an Outreach Specialist and a Mentor through

Impact Justice, dream roles he had always imagined for himself. In these roles he works with people who were systems-impacted as juveniles, as well as folks between the ages of 18-24, and helps them navigate higher education and career opportunities.

“Now I have a new start. It’s amazing. You guys are confirmation that I’m on the right track.”

Jason recognizes that much of his success is the product of his beloved grandmother’s unconditional love and support; she stood by him even when he was at his worst. He is grateful that when she was in hospice that he was able to show her his newly received college degree. “I went from being heavily gang affiliated [to] being the sole caretaker for my grandmother. That’s where I found myself and found my purpose.”

# Our Model



Root & Rebound's model combines four interconnected prongs to dismantle the racial and economic inequity born out of the criminal legal system:

- **Direct Legal Services:** Via our free, statewide legal hotlines, legal clinics, and direct representation in court in California and South Carolina, we have supported more than 10,500 people since our founding in overcoming the legal barriers and discrimination that stand in the way of their reentry goals.
- **Systems Reform:** Through policy advocacy and litigation in California and South Carolina, we remove structural barriers to opportunity for all people impacted by the criminal legal system in housing, employment, family reunification, and more. When we encounter a lack of political will to pass needed reforms, we advance impact litigation against discriminating employers, landlords, and public agencies.
- **Education:** Through the creation and dissemination of free reentry resources, we have created a national hub of information related to civil rights and criminal records including the areas of housing, employment, education, and immigration, with state-specific resources for 11 states.
- **Narrative Change:** We share the voices and stories of our community of clients, partners, and supporters to shed light on systemic injustice, challenge societal stigma around having a criminal record, and put forth a vision for change. We believe in giving people the opportunity to demonstrate through actions who they are today and to construct their own narratives that counter preconceived notions. We actively recruit people with lived experience into leadership roles in our organization; 70% of our Board of Directors is system-impacted.

# Direct Services

Providing services to individuals is at the heart of our model and informs our larger education and systems change work. In 2022:



**2,542**

*people received individualized legal services.*



**880**

*people attended virtual or in-person training sessions*



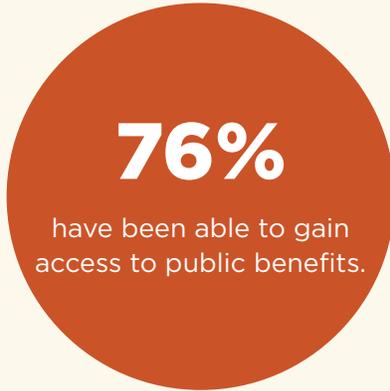
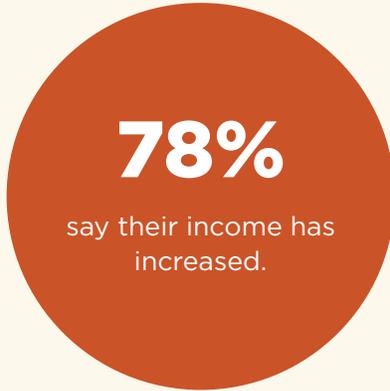
**102**

*people in prison participated in our reentry workshop series*

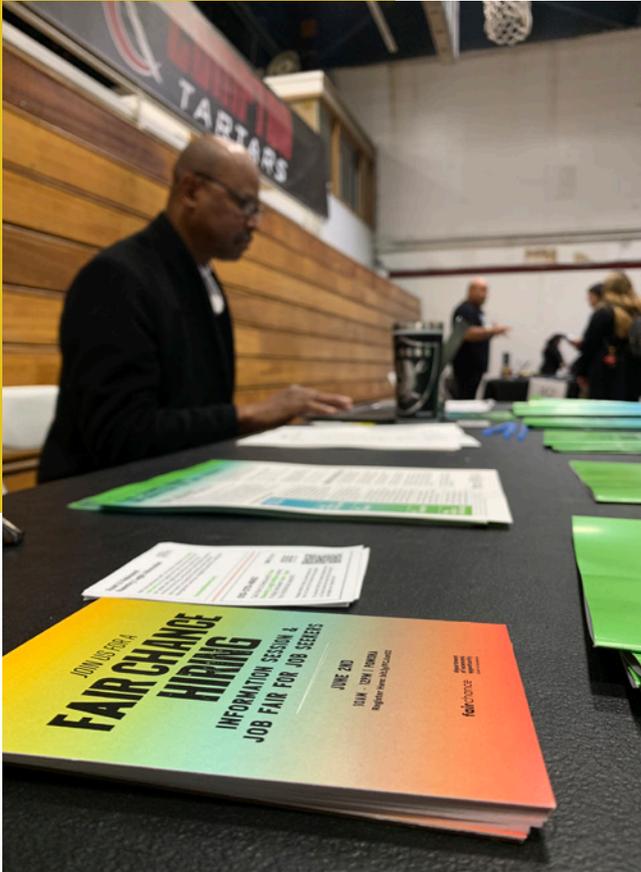
*“This has changed my life forever. I feel like I can go after anything I want to [now] whether it’s career or educational goals.”*

*- R&R Client, Fall 2022*

To measure the impact our services have on the lives of our clients, Root & Rebound conducts a Deep Direct Services Survey twice every year. Our latest survey was conducted in the Fall of 2022 and we received responses from 110 clients who were served from January - June 2022.



# Systems Reform



## Policy

Root & Rebound had great victories on the policy front in 2022.

We co-sponsored six bills in California (SB 1055, SB 1106, SB 990, AB 1924, AB 1720, and AB 960), which have all been enacted into law. These bills address issues including compassionate release, parole and restitution reform, and unfair barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated people.

We also successfully advocated for the veto of SB 1262, which would have allowed the general public to look up a person's criminal history information based on date of birth and name.

This veto protects our litigation win in a case called *All Of Us None-Riverside vs Hamrick*, which provides important privacy protections for those in California with criminal records.

In South Carolina, we spearheaded the creation of the South Carolina Justice Alliance (SCJA), a collaboration of organizations across the state dedicated to achieving meaningful and lasting reforms in the criminal-legal arena. Along with R&R, the core executive committee members include SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center, SC Alliance for Progress (AFP) and Project Not a Statistic (NAS). SCJA has identified parole reform, sentencing reform and economic barriers to reentry as the top three priorities for this legislative session, and have been doggedly advocating for the passage of several key bills, such as a game-changing occupational licensing bill, a bill that would Ban the Box for state government jobs, and several bills that would expand expungement opportunities.

Last but not least, we formed a California policy advisory council, made up of R&R clients who are formerly incarcerated and have expressed interest in being involved in policy work that impacts them and their community. This council informs our systems-change work, and gives members the opportunity to advocate for themselves.

## Litigation

Informed by our direct service work with clients, our litigation efforts protect the rights of systems-impacted individuals who have been unjustly discriminated against based on their record. For example, in March 2022 R&R successfully defeated the background check industry's efforts to reverse a key ruling (*Hamrick*) to remove date of birth search capability from online records searches. This

effort will protect job seekers from unnecessary and unlawful denial based on old records. This year we filed three lawsuits, two against the Los Angeles Unified School District and one against the Department of Social Services, and are about to file two more against courts in Los Angeles and Contra Costa Counties post-SB 1262 veto. We reviewed numerous Fair Chance Cases, 16 of them in depth, and filed seven appeals with the Civil Rights Division. One appeal was granted and led to a settlement through a Department mediation. Two appeals were settled directly with respondents.

We completed a mapping and assessment of South Carolina's litigation potential and, in early 2023, dedicated a full-time lawyer in the South Carolina office to these pursuits. Our South Carolina office is appealing the denial of parole on behalf of several clients in an effort to bring about change, not only on their individual cases but to reform the parole system in South Carolina.

## Education

We have made significant progress on the South Carolina Roadmap to Reentry, a comprehensive resource that will provide instructions on how to navigate through 11 major legal issues as a formerly incarcerated person. Four chapters have been published and are available to the public and to those incarcerated in the South Carolina Department of Corrections for free, with additional chapters planned for release in 2023. The publication of these guides provides justice-impacted South Carolinians the tools to navigate: Voting

and Civic Participation, Education, Housing, and Immigration. We have created a number of parole-related educational materials, and provided instruction for lawyers on representing incarcerated people in parole hearings through a continuing legal education (CLE) sponsored by the South Carolina Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

In June 2022, R&R received an Innovative Programming Grant to take our Road to Reentry in-prison training program to an additional site in California: Folsom State Prison. Our program empowers people to know their rights and navigate challenges after release by teaching how to both legally and practically navigate reentry barriers in key areas of life, including employment, housing, and family unity. Benefits of the program include: 1) skill-building and education related to common barriers to reentry; 2) support in creating an individualized action plan - complemented with personalized resources - to ensure success in reentry and reduce the likelihood of re-incarceration; 3) self-confidence and hope; 4) opportunities for people who are incarcerated to become role models and leaders; and 5) after release, proactive reentry-related support and alumni group phone calls.

We convened our second annual South Carolina policy symposium of organizations working on criminal legal issues in October 2022. The focus of this year's symposium was listening to those who are directly impacted, featuring keynote speaker Latisha Imara, Director of Black Liberation Fund. Topics covered at this year's symposium included: death penalty in South Carolina, parole, voting issues for formerly incarcerated people, bail reform, criminal justice coordinating councils, prison issues, juvenile justice, the right to legal representation in eviction hearings, and fines and fees.



# Narrative Change

At Root & Rebound we work to transform the narrative and political discourse around the criminal legal system and its consequences. A primary way of doing this is by sharing the voices of our client community and ensuring they are at leadership tables.

Root & Rebound hosted the Second Annual Formerly Incarcerated Women's Week (FIWW) in May. This week of programming elevated the invisible reentry barriers often faced by women and was led by our Central Valley staff. Our program focused on mothers in reentry, highlighting the plight of this community as they navigate a multitude of systems and barriers while also caring for children and sustaining households. Highlights of our programming

included a virtual legal clinic, a virtual table talk forum featuring client speakers; an in-person legal resource fair held at a community partner space in Fresno; and a Central Valley client appreciation lunch where we treated clients and their children to a Mother's Day celebration, and they were able to hear from community role models who have gone through their own reentry journey, including R&R Executive Director Carmen Garcia.

In 2022 we made a conscious effort to bring on board and staff members who are systems-impacted, meaning they or a loved one has been involved in the criminal legal system. Approximately 40% of our staff and 70% of our board identify as systems-impacted.

# Felicia Martinez

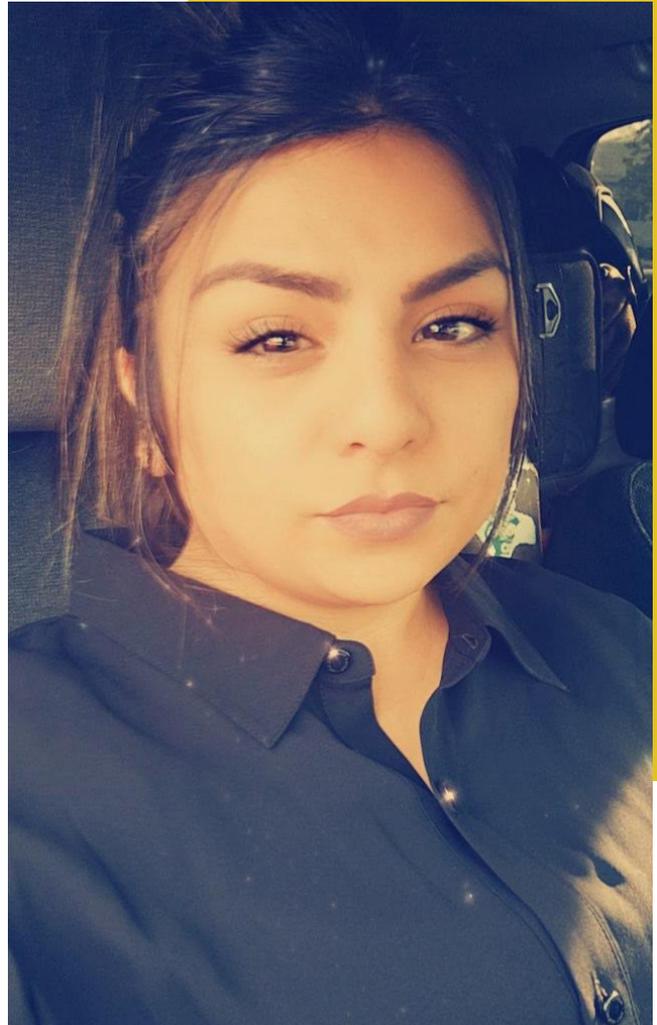
Reentry journeys are as varied as the individuals who take them, and more often than not, do not follow simple nor direct trajectories. Throughout her struggles with addiction while in reentry, Felicia found R&R to be a place free of judgment. "I thank Root & Rebound for always being there, for being... my rock."

She worked closely with social services staff in our Fresno office to develop a plan to achieve her goals. She took advantage of the wrap-around social and legal services that R&R provided: connections to a therapist, financial assistance with emergency needs, referrals for housing, assistance with building her credit, employment resources, and a referral to get her taxes prepared for free. Reuniting with her children was also a goal and R&R is helping her to prepare for upcoming court appearances.

All of her hard work and persistence is paying off. Proudly, more than one year clean and sober, she is employed, has her own apartment, and is currently taking classes at Fresno City College.

"[My 16 year old son says] 'Mom you're awesome, I'm so proud of you for being in school.' "

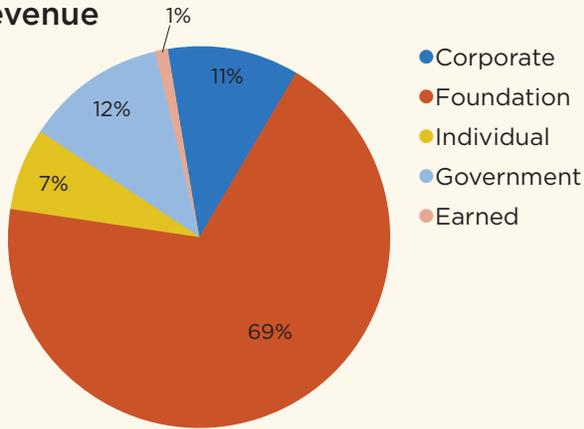
She is pursuing a certificate to become a substance abuse counselor and wants to give back to her community.



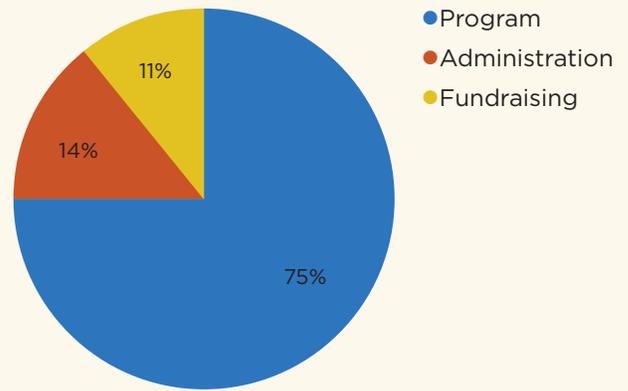
*"I really have changed so much in my life and I know that there's just no stopping me."*

# Financial Overview

Revenue



Expenses



*"I can not thank Root & Rebound enough for helping me to leave my past in the past and walk into the newness of life."*

*- R&R Client, Fall 2022*

*Your donations make this work possible - Thank You!*

[www.rootandrebound.org](http://www.rootandrebound.org)

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