

# Mend

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## Contributors - Mend, v.1

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Becky Brasfield** is an advocate for recovery, disability rights, and legal system-impacted individuals. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology and her master's degree in sociology from the University of Illinois. Becky is a Certified Recovery Support Specialist and a Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner. She is currently the president of the Board of the NAMI Illinois Alliance of Peer Professionals. Becky is a Cook County Equity Cohort Fellow, an HSRJ Behavioral Health Policy Fellow, and a member of Disability Lead, an organization for emerging leaders with disabilities. Becky believes that through a commitment to purpose, opportunities, and values, a person's life can be transformed.

**Destany Beckwith** has been incarcerated at Taconic Correctional Facility for the past six years. She is 23, from Schenectady NY, and in the process of working on an associate degree. She writes, "I would like to say thank you to my family and girlfriend for sticking by my side through thick and thin and believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself."

**Michael Berg** writes, "I'm a currently incarcerated man with shattered dreams and a minimum of 7 1/2 years left on a 20-to-life bid. I am utterly broken (and I'm coming to understand that I always have been), but with God's help, I am

healing, however slowly. I currently have only 3 goals in life: 1. Go home (whatever "home" means anymore); 2. Prepare to go home (information, knowledge, plans, etc.); and 3. Stay sane while doing the first two. Anything else is fluff."

**Robert Ehrenberg** is 64 years old and currently living in Queens County. He is a recent college graduate and holds an associate degree in humanities and a bachelor's degree in social science. He now dedicates his time to various avenues that promote higher education and criminal justice reform while giving back to the community.

**Ivan Flores** is a writer and poet seeking to inspire a world that needs to change in many ways. He writes, "I hope you can step up and do your part to help a cause. Pure hearts are needed to create!"

**Theresa Fortner** is a devoted mother and grandmother from the St. Louis area who enjoys gardening, exercising, and crafting galore. She is pursuing a liberal arts degree at Washington University. She is a Christian and a loyal Chiefs fan!

**Justin Guyton** is a native of Akron, OH, and an author, a music producer, and an entrepreneur. As the owner of Blowboi Entertainment, he has helped many other incarcerated individuals become

Art by Feimo Zhu.

published authors. His book *Felon: The New Slur Word - Revised Edition* highlights many of the injustices within the criminal justice system.

**Kwaneta Harris** is a perimenopausal criminalized survivor who has somehow managed to survive the infamous and deadly Texas triple-digit temperatures in a non-air-conditioned cell the size of a parking space in solitary confinement. A regrettably late-to-the-party feminist and a prison abolitionist, Harris is dedicated to unlearning beliefs that contribute to trauma.

**Vicki Hicks** is an incarcerated writer with Exchange for Change. She is a grandmother of four and a contributor to *Don't Shake the Spoon* and *Prisoner Express*.

**Dr. Ray Legler** is a community psychologist and an assistant professor in the Community Psychology Doctoral Program at National Louis University in Chicago. His professional interests focus on the needs of children and youth in cities. This includes experience with school-community partnerships, after-school programs, and education policy. His recent work has involved support for a community-based project designed to build connections between the education system, the business community, and others to support the transition from high school to post-secondary education or training for students living in low-income communities.

**Gary A. Marez** was born in 1980 in a small New Mexico town called Clovis. His family was very poor. He has three siblings, all younger, whom he loves dearly. He writes, "I have never had or known much of a life outside of incarceration. I was raised by the juvenile and adult prison systems and taught to believe that I would never amount to much other than what I am right now—inmate: #53090. Recently, writing has made me feel better about myself and see myself beyond this number. I hope my piece helps someone who also believes that their safe place is a cell understand that feeling safe isn't the same as being safe! Although I felt safe in prison, it turned out to be one of the most unsafe places of all. Please enjoy and remember to be safe."

**Gary McCain** is enrolled in Holy Cross's Moreau College Initiative (MCI) at Westville Correctional Facility, where he will soon complete his bachelor's degree with a dual concentration in humanities and social science. An aspiring author, McCain has had a few pieces of work published, including two poems and a short story.

**Christopher Reece** is a writer of poetry and plays from Kalamazoo, MI. Before choosing to become a criminal, Reece was a young kid who enjoyed being a deacon and a Boy Scout. He loved all sports, especially basketball. He is serving ten to thirty years at a Level 5 max prison.

**Jeffrey A. Shockley** is a 60-year-old African American in the 23rd year of a life sentence being served in the state of Pennsylvania. He writes, "At the time, I was 37 years old when committing the heinous crime and strive daily to live this life in honor of those I have hurt."

**Ronald Short** is 73 years old. Sentenced to natural life in 1999 on his first incarceration, Short spent two years in Rikers Island and 11 years in Clinton Correctional Facility and is currently at Auburn Correctional Facility, where he has been for the past 11 years.

**Basia Skudrzyk** is workforce equity director at Prison to Professionals (P2P) and the director of the executive committee for the Education Development Center's STEM-OPS (STEM opportunities in prison settings) program. She is also the founder and CEO of World Wide Smart Beauty, a consulting company working with clients globally to enhance their brands and DEI footprints. Her accomplishments include more than 20 years of unlocking people's potential to advance in the world through education and workforce development. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in business administration with a focus on supply chain risk and resilience at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. She partners with clients and organizations globally to reach, touch, and change the lives of people through mentoring, education, workforce development, advocacy, and policy change.

**Dr. MoDena Stinnette** works in social services. Her contributions have been a combination of lived experience, education, and professional development. Her current roles include social worker for the University of Illinois Chicago, project coordinator for the Northern Illinois Recovery Community Organization, and adjunct faculty member at National Louis University in Chicago, IL, and Dominican University in River Forest, IL.

**Marvin Wade** is a social and spiritual activist. Born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1970 to Dorothy Wade, a single mother of three, Marvin enjoys meditating, exercising, and spending time with family and friends. He is blessed with the gift of storytelling through the art of writing. After serving twenty-five years, he was released in 2019.

