

RE-ENTRY

An Insider's Guide

Advice for coming home to Alachua County,
by and for formerly incarcerated people



Torchlighters Re-Entry Support

Welcome Home!

One chapter is ending, but another is just beginning. Getting out of incarceration can be challenging to say the least. **We know! We've been through it ourselves.** We understand the difficulties of this journey. We also understand that by coming together, sharing our experiences and resources, we support each other and triumph. **What has helped us most is each other** - the lived experience and advice that can only be known by someone who's been through it too. That's why all of the insights and quotes in this guide are from former prisoners. There is a lot of information about re-entry out there, but we have found that the reality of coming out doesn't always add up with that information. Other people have learned the hard way what works and what doesn't. Let that hard-won knowledge spare you from making the same mistakes. **This isn't about surviving, it's about thriving.**

“The reality of freedom. I was walking outside the fences without handcuffs or a guard for the first time in years. This is real, the dream has finally come true.”

Everyone is different. Your circumstances are unique to you. However, as former prisoners we all have barriers to overcome. This is something we all share that gives us collective strength. We will face disappointment, rejection, and bias. We will run into walls. We may even feel like we're taking steps backward at times. That's all ok. You are far from alone. Even when it feels like we're swimming against the stream **we carry each other through.**

Goals

As you read through the guide, think about **what you genuinely want for your life.** One thing to consider doing is making a list of goals. Like actually write them out. It can be super helpful to visualize and organize your intentions and thoughts this way. Seeing them written out can make them come alive. Think about what steps are needed to accomplish your goals. What information do you need to gather to make informed decisions? Just a little something to chew on as you move forward.

GOAL	STEPS TO GET THERE	COMPLETION DATE
1.		
2.		
3.		



About Torchlighters Re-Entry Support

Torchlighters Re-Entry Support is a network of formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones who share experiences and support one another. It came to life as a campaign through Community Spring (for more information check out csgnv.org). Learn more about Torchlighters at tinyurl.com/ReEntryGNV or contact us at torchlightersgnv@gmail.com, 352-559-4505, or PO Box 5811, Gainesville, FL 32627.

Deepest gratitude to all of the former prisoners and their loved ones who opened their hearts, shared their experience, and lent their voices to this guide. **You are the true Torchlighters.**

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Last updated: May 2021



ID & Other Documents

Documents aren't the most exciting things in the world. We know. But they are **super important** and should be up at the top of your list of things to take care of. ID is necessary to access public benefits and services, apply for housing and employment, and enroll in school and other programs. **You'll need these vital documents - they are the keys to open other doors.**

Some of these things can be started and achieved while you're still incarcerated. Start as early as you can. If possible, ask your classification officer for help (assuming they're helpful). And speaking of documents, you might leave prison with a giant stack of papers. Keep all of that! You never know when they might be helpful, even years down the road.

“When I went to get my license I didn't have all the right documents with me so I had to come back. I wish I would've just brought it all with me the first time. Would've saved me the headache.”

The **3 KEY DOCUMENTS** you need are (1) your birth certificate, (2) your Social Security card (or number), and (3) a state ID or driver's license. Once you have your birth certificate and Social Security number (SSN), you will be able to get a state ID card or a driver's license. Once in a while, you will need to show a physical copy of your Social Security card for certain services, but just knowing your Social Security number can sometimes be enough. Your ID documents must be in your “legal” name. This will be the name that appears on your birth certificate unless you have legally changed it. Even if you used other names in the past, stick with your legal name.

Remember those papers you had when you left prison? Bring them with you if you have to go get your ID and other documents. They might help to fill in some gaps and smooth out the process. This has made a big difference for some of us.

Many forms of ID require that you pay a fee before they are issued, but some of these fees can be reduced or excused. Before you pay a fee for anything, find out if you can get a “reduced fee” or “fee waiver.” You might qualify based on proof of receiving public benefits (food stamps/EBT), verification of homelessness, or proof of recent incarceration. It's worth a shot. Bring proof of whatever you have.



Resources:

[Alachua County Tax Collector](#)

ID, various locations,
352-374-5236,
alachuacollector.com

[Department of Health,](#)

[Bureau of Vital Statistics](#)
Birth Certificate, P.O. Box 210,
1217 Pearl Street,
Jacksonville, FL 32231,
904-359-6900,
floridahealth.gov/certificates

[Social Security Office](#)

SS Card, 4562 NW 13th St,
Gainesville, FL 32609,
877-219-8323, ssa.gov

Technology

Technology has become so vital - **knowing how to use it isn't just important, it's necessary.** It's everywhere. It can also help to open doors for you and make your life easier.

Phones now are essentially supercomputers in your pocket and there are some things to learn. Some of us have been away from the free world for quite a long time so we might need some extra assistance getting to know how to use these devices. There is nothing wrong with needing that help so don't be shy. Maybe a loved one can show you the ropes. Or you can reach out to us at Torchlighters and we can take some time to go over the fundamentals. Once you learn the basics you'll be on your way.

“Ask for help. There is so much new stuff out here, everything has a computer. My phone drives me crazy, but I ask someone nearby whenever I don't know how to do something. Nobody has laughed, made a slick comment, or made fun of me. EVERY SINGLE ONE has gladly helped me. People want to help – they genuinely do want a better life for us.”

If you don't have a way to get online or need extra technological help, one great route is to go to the library. They have free internet access. Check in there and they'll walk you through the process to get on a computer. Also, if you need help with navigating technology in general they can be extremely helpful. They assist with computer literacy. The folks at the library are amazing and there to help you, so ask for what you need.

Resources:

[Alachua County Library](#)

various locations, 352-334-3939,
ask@aclib.libanswers.com, aclib.us

[Safelink Wireless](#)

Free/low-cost phone service, 800-723-3546,
safelinkwireless.com



Parole & Probation

If you have probation or parole, go see those people ASAP! You must. More on the fees later.

Try to stay on the good side of your probation/parole officer. They have a tremendous amount of power over your freedom. They're not your friend, and you shouldn't necessarily view them as your enemy either, but it's a good idea to maintain a decent relationship with them. How you conduct yourself matters. We have found that keeping things cordial and simple is a good idea. "Yes, ma'am/sir. No, ma'am/sir." Be respectful, courteous, and brief.

Make sure you're checking all the necessary boxes. **Keep up with your conditions of supervision.** Get to know those conditions and ask questions to make sure you fully understand and don't get violated over something ridiculous. Nearly half of probation violations are just technical and not even a new charge. Make your payments and understand you could be subject to drug screening. Be on time and on point for your check-in appointments.

"I was ready to be free, but I felt like I wasn't really free because I still had probation. It was like a constant reminder that I could go back at any time."

Speaking of time, block some out for probation appointments. Rarely is your monthly check-in going to be quick. Probation offices can run slowly, so an appointment time can be fairly meaningless. You could be in and out, you could be there for 15 minutes, or you could be there for hours. As time goes on, you'll get to know how your PO operates and be able to plan accordingly. To be safe, just plan on a long wait in the beginning especially.

You can try to get off probation early. This isn't happening on day one so plan on doing some time on probation. You're going to have to demonstrate that you're on a good path before putting into a judge for early termination. You can, however, put in to modify your probation at any time. Your conditions can be adjusted if a judge agrees. Something to keep in mind.

Resources:

[Federal Probation](#)

401 SE 1st Ave #228,
Gainesville, FL 32601,
352-380-2425,
uscourts.gov/services-forms/probation-and-pretrial-services

[Felony Probation](#)

215 SE 2nd Ave, Gainesville,
FL 32601, 352-955-2023
dc.state.fl.us/cc/index.html

[Misdemeanor Probation](#)

14 NE 1st St, Gainesville, FL
32601, 352-338-7390,
alachuacounty.us/depts/courtservices/pages/countyprobation.aspx



Housing

Some places won't let you live there because of your record. Let's just get that reality out on the table. Some property management companies are a dead end while other apartment complexes don't even ask. Before you pay any application fees, try and find out if it's a lost cause. Plenty of people have wasted money applying for a place to live that they never even stood a chance of getting. **Your money and your time are too valuable to waste.**

“I couldn't stay with family so I had nowhere to go. Even though I had a job it was so hard with nowhere to lay my head at night.”

Smaller landlords with just a few units tend to be better options. They are less likely to run background checks, and they can be better about seeing you for who you are today and not hung up on your past. Word of mouth can also be very useful in finding a place. Talk to other folks. Keep your ears open. You never know what might happen. You can also reach out to us here directly and we can offer some insight and advice.

[GRACE Marketplace](#) is a low-barrier shelter for single adults. They have a lot of resources available to help you find permanent housing, even if you're not a guest there. You may not want to stay at a homeless shelter, that's fine and understandable, but get over yourself and get there if you need it. Many of the staff there have been through the same situations and can be tremendous support as you put the pieces together.

Resources:

[Family Promise](#)

Family shelter, P.O. Box 5189,
Gainesville, FL 32627,
352-378-2030,
GNVFamilyPromise@gmail.com,
familypromisegvl.org

[GRACE Marketplace](#)

Adult shelter, 3055 NE 28th
Drive, Gainesville, FL 32609,
352-792-0800,
hello@gracemarketplace.org,
gracemarketplace.org

[Meridian Behavioral Healthcare](#)

*Housing for substance abuse
& mental health*,
352-374-5600, mbhci.org

[St. Francis House](#)

Family shelter, 413 S. Main
Street, Gainesville, FL 32601,
352-378-9079,
stfrancishousegnv.com



Employment & Entrepreneurship

Chances are you're going to need a job. Check out our ever-growing list of certified [Fair Chance Employers](#). These are businesses that have certified that they don't discriminate based on background. They're willing to hear you out and see you for who you are today.

A lot of corporate places of employment can be difficult. They often have policies that will be absolute barriers depending on the type of conviction and how long ago it happened. Not saying it's impossible, just possibly harder to plug into those places. Try to know as much as possible about the strict limitations in advance. As with everything, **don't waste your time and energy on obvious dead ends. You're way too valuable for that.**

Temp agencies can sometimes get you connected with decent work. It can depend on if the temp agency itself has policies against criminal records. Same with day labor. Most of those places will plug you in somewhere if they can. You may face some limits but sometimes those temporary job placements can turn into permanent hires.

“I got so tired of being shut out of jobs I was qualified for that I just went ahead and started my own business.”

One helpful piece of advice about job interviews is to answer any questions about your past confidently and factually. Prepare to give context to your past in an undefensive way. Questions may arise, so be open when you're prompted.

Again, good old-fashioned word of mouth can be helpful. People connecting with other people. Ask around - open your mouth about looking for work, you never know who might be listening. Keep your eyes and ears open, too. Some signs and conversations might fall into your lap if you're paying attention. Keep putting yourself out there. No matter how many rejections you get, keep going. Standing still will never move you forward. You'll get something. Even if you land a job that isn't your dream of dreams, **stepping stones can help you get your stride.**

Some folks take the path of just starting their own business. Sometimes we need to create our own opportunities. There are resources available to help you officially start a company. And ask about resources specifically geared toward formerly incarcerated people. They exist.



Resources:

[Careersource](#)

Employment assistance,
1112 N. Main St,
352-955-2245,
careersourcencfl.com

[Florida Small Business](#)

[Resource Guide](#)
850-245-6500,
info@dos.myflorida.com,
dos.myflorida.com/library-arc
hives/business

[Gator Community](#)

[Entrepreneurship Initiative:](#)
[Gator Bootcamp](#)
Entrepreneur assistance,
352-273-0330

[Inmates to Entrepreneurs](#)

Entrepreneur training,
info@inmatestoentrepreneurs.org,
inmatestoentrepreneurs.org

[Torchlighters Certified Fair](#)

[Chance Employers](#)
352-559-4505,
torchlightersgnv@gmail.com,
tinyurl.com/ReEntryGNV

[Workforce Development](#)

Free career skills training,
352-294-0856,
engage.aa.ufl.edu/workforce-development

Fines, Fees & Debt

Make those probation payments. They're not playing around. Use JPay online services, the JPay app, pay over the phone, go to a MoneyGram location, or mail it in. Whatever it takes to stay on top of it.

“It's terrifyingly difficult to get out of trouble once you are in it. Choose the easy way and do right.”

Make sure you know how much you owe and where and how to make those payments. Some fees need to go to different places. Court fees and fines are NOT probation fees. Ask for clarification of what is going to who and when. This needs to be right.

You might have to take mandatory classes as part of your sentence. Be sure to set aside money for that. Failure to pay could result in a violation.

If child support is something you must pay, this is also crucial. They know you're home, believe us. And they aren't going to wait too long before they start hitting you up. Connect with them as soon as you can. Don't put it off - it just gets worse and can result in more time in a cage.



Resources:

[Bridges to Prosperity](#)

Financial fitness class,
352-554-6214

[Child Support](#)

Florida Department of
Revenue, 5050 West
Tennessee Street,
Tallahassee, FL 32399,
850-488-5437,
[myfloridacounty.com/child_s
upport/](http://myfloridacounty.com/child_support/)

[Florida Rights Restoration Coalition](#)

Fines and fees modification,
407-901-3749,
info@floridarrc.org,
floridarrc.com

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[About Court Ordered](#)

[Payments](#)

Info and links,
dc.state.fl.us/cc/cospay.html

[Parole & Probation Fees](#)

Payment portal,
jpay.com/ParoleProb.aspx

Education

You might be interested in some education. Maybe you have none, maybe you have some. Regardless, you've got options. And there is [funding](#) available for former prisoners that you might qualify for (look at [FAFSA](#) and [Pell Grants](#)). Whether you're looking for basic education, a GED/high school diploma, college courses, certifications, or other vocational training, there are ways to move ahead. As with everything, **you are the expert in your own life.**

[“Take Charge of Your Future: Get the Education and Training You Need”](#) is a good resource put out by the Department of Education. It's got some valuable insights and things to consider as you think about pursuing education.

“After living with a limited number of colors, smells, tastes, and textures for so long in prison, the sensory overload of freedom was overwhelming.”

Resources:

[Alachua County Library](#)

Adult education, literacy,
English classes, various
locations, 352-334-3929,
literacy@aclib.us, aclib.us

[Alachua County Public Schools](#)

English classes,
352-955-7035, sbac.edu

[Gainesville Community Ministry](#)

GED prep, 238 SW 4th Ave,
Gainesville, FL 32601,
352-372-8162,
gcmone@bellsouth.net,
gcmhelp.org



[Santa Fe College](#)

GED prep, vocational training,
college courses,
352-395-5000, sfcollege.edu

[The University of Florida](#)

Job skills, college courses,
352-392-3261, ufl.edu

[Youthbuild](#) (ages 16-24)

GED prep & vocational
training, 635 NW 6th St,
Gainesville, FL 32601,
352-225-3307,
info@projectyouthbuild.org,
projectyouthbuild.org

Health & Well-Being

One thing that so often gets overlooked as we try to piece together vital, practical things is our well-being. **This is just as essential as everything else, sometimes even more so.** Many folks have neglected it with disastrous results. We have been traumatized while incarcerated - this is simply unavoidable no matter who you are. And many of us have trauma from long before we were ever in a cage. These truths must be acknowledged and taken care of. Take care of your whole self - physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Lean on others when you can. Find someone you trust and discuss openly what's going on now and what you've been through. Peers who have been through similar experiences can be great resources. Don't hold it in. Think about getting with a professional too. There are free or low-cost counselors available that care about you. Sometimes just getting real with another human being can liberate you from whatever it is that's eating you up inside. We have found that when we keep it in, it rots and makes us sick.

“You need a strong support system upon re-entry. I was freaked out when I got out. I should have gone to counseling to be honest.”

Think about looking into mediation and mindfulness opportunities. Maybe you find this grounded connection through prayer. Wherever you find a sense of peace and surrender, go with that. We've been failed by people and circumstances in our lives, but we have never been failed by simply staying with our breath. **If we can't come home within ourselves, how can we expect to come home anywhere else?**

If you're fortunate enough to have loved ones in your life, try to reconnect with them now that you're home. Keep in mind that they've been doing time too, in their own way. It might not be easy in the beginning as everyone gets to know themselves and each other again, but cherish these folks dearly.



Healthy relationships can be so meaningful and keep us afloat. On the flip side of that, toxic relationships can drown us. Cut the ties to the people poisoning your life and mend ties with the people who give you strength. Only you can tell the difference between the two.

And also remember that you have so much to offer! You have wisdom and strength that could benefit the whole world. Keeping that hidden isn't fair. **You are an amazing and valuable person so share that light!**

Resources:

[Alachua County Crisis Center](#)

Mental health, 218 SE 24th St, Gainesville, FL 32641, 352-264-6789, alachuacounty.us/Depts/CSS/CrisisCenter/Pages/CrisisCenter.aspx

[Helping Hands Clinic](#)

Medical & mental health, 419 NE 1st St, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-519-5542, hhclinicgnv.org

[Peaceful Paths](#)

Domestic abuse support, 2100 NW 53rd Ave, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32653, 352-377-8255, peacefulpaths.org

[Alachua County Health Department](#)

Clinical services, wellness programs, community health, 218 SE 24th St, Gainesville, FL 32641, 352-334-7900, alachua.floridahealth.gov

[Meridian Behavioral Healthcare](#)

Mental health & substance abuse, 352-374-5600, mbhci.org

[Gainesville Peer Respite](#)

Peer support, 728 E. University Ave, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-559-4559 (warmline), 352-278-0529 (business), gainesvillerespite.org

[Partnership for Strong Families](#)

Child & family wellness, 5950 NW 1st Pl, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32607, 352-244-1500, pfsf.org

Advocacy

People care. Really, they do. There are some local organizations providing advocacy and support for currently and formerly incarcerated people. These organizations can provide help and support if you want to **be involved in true lasting change** for the next person coming home. Consider how powerful your voice can be, and use it!



Resources:

[Dream Defenders](#)

goDDsville@gmail.com,
[facebook.com/UFDreamDefenders](https://www.facebook.com/UFDreamDefenders)

[Fight Toxic Prisons](#)

P.O. Box 358439, Gainesville,
FL 32635,
fighttoxicprisons@gmail.com,
fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com

[Florida Council for](#)

[Incarcerated & Formerly
Incarcerated Women & Girls](#)
floridacouncilfreeher@gmail.
com, 352-246-4123,
floridacouncilfreeher.wordpress.com

[Florida Prisoner Solidarity](#)

P.O. Box 358439, Gainesville,
FL 32635, 850-895-1505,
flprisonersolidarity@gmail.com,
flprisonersolidarity.org

[Florida Rights Restoration Coalition](#)

407-901-3749,
info@floridarrc.org,
floridarrc.com

[Legal Empowerment Advocacy Hub](#)

leah4justicenow@gmail.com,
407-852-8504,
leahforjustice.com

[Torchlighters Re-Entry Support](#)

P.O. Box 5811, Gainesville, FL
32627, 352-559-4505,
torchlightersgnv@gmail.com,
tinyurl.com/ReEntryGNV

Services

While Torchlighters is NOT a social service agency—meaning we do not directly provide housing, food, etc.—we recognize the importance of making those connections. We do our absolute best to know which agencies are providing supportive services to people in re-entry. We are constantly connecting with new community resources, and they are always expanding, closing, or otherwise changing. Because of this, it's not practical to list every social service agency in this guide. We add to it when we find new resources and try to check to make sure the contact information is accurate — but we cannot make sure they are 100% up-to-date. Feel free to call us for the most current resources, or check out our [Resource Guide](#). **We hope this helps. We all need some support.**

“Just because other people haven't been to prison doesn't mean they shouldn't have already or won't in the future. They are no smarter or better than you.”



Resources:

[Alachua County Social Services](#)

Info and referrals, health services, short term financial assistance, 218 SE 24th St, Gainesville, FL 32641, 352-264-6750, socialservices@alachuacounty.us

[Department of Children & Families](#)

Food assistance, 1000 NE 16th Ave, Bldg J, Gainesville, FL 32601, 866-762-2237, myflorida.com/accessflorida

[Office of Executive Clemency](#)

4070 Esplanade Way, Tallahassee, FL 32399, 850-922-0000, ClemencyWeb@fcor.state.fl.us, fcor.state.fl.us/clemency

[UF Health - Equal Access Clinics](#)

Medical & mental health, multiple locations, 352-273-9425, equalaccess.med.ufl.edu

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

Peer support & substance abuse, 352-372-8091, aagainesville.org

[Family Law Self-Help Center](#)

File your own legal documents, 201 E. University Ave, Room 413, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-548-3781, SelfHelp@circuit8.org, circuit8.org/self-help

[RTS - Regional Transit Service](#)

Public transportation, 352-334-2600, go-rtts.com

[Unemployment Assistance](#)

Reemployment assistance benefits, 833-352-7759, floridajobs.org

[Bread of the Mighty Food Bank](#)

Food, 325 NW 10th Ave, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-336-0839, foodbank7@bellsouth.net, breadofthemighty.org

[Narcotics Anonymous](#)

Peer support & substance abuse, 352-376-8008, uncoastna.org

[Three Rivers Legal Services](#)

Legal assistance, 1000 NE 16th Ave, Bldg I, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-372-0519, info@trls.org, trls.org

[United Way of North Central Florida](#)

6031 NW 1st Pl, Gainesville, FL 32607, 211 (hotline), unitedwayncfl.org



Re-Entry Checklist

This checklist can help you **prepare** to avoid common re-entry issues. It can help you understand where you are already well-prepared and where you'd like to focus more. Every person's circumstances are different, so **use this checklist however it works best for you.**

ID & Other Docs:

When I am released, I will have access to:

- Birth certificate
- State ID (valid / expired)
- Driver License (valid / expired / suspended or revoked)
- Social Security card or number
- U.S. passport (valid / expired)
- I think my voting rights will be restored when: _____ (what event or date)

Parole & Probation:

- My expected release date is: _____
- I think my supervision type will be: _____
- I think the length of time I will be on supervision is: _____
- My expected county or district of supervision will be: _____
- I have "special" or "discretionary" conditions I have to follow: Yes / No

If yes, I think they are the following: _____

- Registration requirements: Yes / No

Housing:

- In the short-term, I will live in/with: _____
- In the long-term, I'd like to live in/with: _____
- My record may affect where I can live in the following ways: _____

Public Benefits:

- I have received: _____ benefits in the past

While still incarcerated, I can begin to apply for (but not yet receive):

- Social Security retirement benefits
- Supplemental Social Income (SSI)
- Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)
- Veteran's benefits
- Medicare

When I'm released, I can also apply for any of the above, plus:

- Mobile phone assistance
- Food assistance



Employment:

- Previously, I have worked as a: _____
- My long-term goal is to work as a: _____
- My record may affect where I can work in the following ways: _____
- Will my future career require a professional license or certificate? Yes / No
- I have researched potential job or licensing barriers I might face because of my record. Yes / No

Court-Ordered Debt:

- I owe victim’s restitution. I pay it to: _____
- I owe restitution to the state. I pay it to _____
- I owe court fines, penalties, or fees. I pay it to: _____
- I owe traffic fines. I pay it to: _____
- I owe child support. I pay it to: _____ (other parent / child support agency)

I will talk to the following people/programs about ways to reduce my debt or set up a payment plan:

- Probation/parole officer
- Traffic court
- The court that convicted/sentenced me

Education:

Which level of education have I already completed and what do I still want?

- High school diploma / GED / Adult Basic Education (have it / want it)
- Associate’s degree / Trade certificate (have it / want it)
- Bachelor’s degree: _____ (degree, major) (have it / want it)
- Graduate degree: _____ (degree, field) (have it / want it)
- I plan to apply for the following types of financial aid and scholarships: _____

Family & Children:

- I have children (names, ages): _____
- They are currently living: _____
- I am hoping to reunify with my children: Yes / No

There are orders against me that could impact reunifying with my children:

- Criminal court order Who? _____ When? _____
- Civil restraining order Who? _____ When? _____
- Condition of my supervision Who? _____ When? _____
- Custody/visitation order in place
- The rules of the custody/ visitation order: _____

Things I’m not sure about and will follow up on:

- _____
- _____
- _____

