



BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO PAROLEES

Virtually everyone has a hard time making ends meet from time to time, and parolees bear an additional burden in that area. Until you can get fully on your feet there are some government benefits available to parolees in certain circumstances. Some provide direct assistance, to help you make it day to day, and some offer help in getting started again. All have certain requirements, first and foremost, a valid ID and Social Security number.

General Assistance/Food Stamps: Modest cash benefits and/or an electronic debit card for use in purchasing food. To receive either or both you must be low income and provide the following: picture ID, home address, Social Security number, along with the total amount of your earnings during the month and the number of persons living in your home—not including roommates or friends. Apply for these benefits at the Social Service department in the county where you live. Food stamps are now called Cal Fresh.

Social Security/SSI: Both these benefits are federal programs. Social Security payments are available to those 62 years and older, who have worked and paid taxes but are no longer working. In some cases you may be able to draw Social Security benefits and still work a part-time or low-paying job or if you are a survivor of someone who was eligible to have drawn Social Security benefits (deceased spouse, etc.) or were supported by someone who had received Social Security benefits. You will need a picture ID and your Social Security number. While no one is eligible to receive Social Security benefits while in prison or jail, once released you may receive benefits if eligible.

SSI (Supplemental Security Income) is for those who are medically or mentally disabled and can provide medical proof of that condition. You must be a US citizen or legal alien but do not have to have worked and contributed taxes to the system. Again, a picture ID and Social Security number are required to start the process and if turned down you may file an appeal. Apply for both Social Security and SSI at the nearest Social Security office.

Medicare/MediCal: Medicare is federally funded through the Social Security Administration and provides hospitalization and medical insurance to those 65 years and older, or under 65 and disabled, receiving Social Security for 24 months. If you have other medical insurance but suffer total kidney failure, Medicare is available. MediCal is California’s insurance for low income and 65 year of age or older. The usual identification requirements are needed and you can apply at the Social Security office.

Cash Assistance Loans: If no other source of income is available parole agents may ask for a loan for parolees; it is a loan, not a grant, and must be repaid. Parole agents should be aware of this program and, if other remedies are exhausted, be willing to assist in applying for the benefit.

Employment Help: If you have a physical, mental or learning disability the Department of Rehabilitation may be able to help you find a job. A history of addiction can be considered a disability but you must be clean and sober to apply for this help. Your disability must prevent you from returning to your previous line of work but you must also be able to work.

Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA): This program, out of the Employment Development Department (EDD), will pay half the wages of those participating in the program and lower the tax liability of businesses participating. More information is available through your parole agent, or the EDD or Department of Education.

If you are a military veteran you may be eligible for assistance in job training and education and/or benefits. This is especially true if you have a disability, even one that is not service connected. Job training, medical and general benefits may be possible. Contact the Veterans’ Administration at 877-294-6380. You may also need to contact the CDCR at 916-229-0475 to authorize release of your medical records to confirm your disability.

Consider all these options, talk to your agent (at least that’s supposed to be the way it works) and see if there is assistance available to help you. If you’re fresh out of prison or going through a hard patch after a few months of freedom, be sure to avail yourself of all the help out here.

TIMELINE

A 20 year snapshot of paroles granted by the Board of Parole Hearings/Board of Prison Terms from 1994 through 2014. A mark of how far we’ve come. Welcome home.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>GRANTS</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>GRANTS</u>
1994	12	2004	214
1995	8	2005	161
1996	10	2006	241
1997	16	2007	119
1998	27	2008	293
1999	13	2009	542
2000	52	2010	494
2001	83	2011	463
2002	168	2012	670
2003	168	2013	590

Unofficial figures for 2014; parole grants expected to top 750.



THE YEAR

Hard to believe that January will mark the 5th anniversary of Life Support Alliance. In many ways it seems only a short time ago Gail Brown and I (Vanessa) with the help and encouragement of our then-incarcerated husbands (Barry and David, respectively) decided we'd had enough of Lifers being left out of every conversation about who can be released and why, but other moments seem like we've been in this whirlwind forever.

Sitting in a low-cost neighborhood diner we decided that if no one else was audacious enough to take on the Lifer cause then we would. Our first aim was to remind the powers-that-be (legislators, board members, media and public) that Lifers, of all identifiable prisoner cohorts, were the safest group to release—and cost the most money to continually incarcerate. Our mantra chant became 'Lifers recidivate at less than 1%.' So imagine our delight when a board commissioner, speaking to the Senate Rules Committee at his confirmation hearing earlier this year, told that Senate body—"Lifers recidivate at less than 1%!"

Our next goal became cracking the monolithic face of the Board of Parole Hearings. A few months into the existence of LSA we began attending every monthly meeting of the Board and, using the public comment venue, always found something we felt the commissioners need to know or be reminded about. We've become a fixture at those meetings and even the security guards know us and look for us—seriously, we don't think they could hold those meetings if we weren't there.

What was at first an uphill battle, complete with reluctance from the BPH administration to cough up public record documents, like hearing transcripts, has become a mutually respectful working relationship with the BPH. And we can't take full credit for that—the change of administration via Gov. Brown's appointment of new Executive Director Jennifer Shaffer and Ms. Shaffer's commitment to open government and following the law happily coincided with our push to learn more about the parole process and share what we learn. Our interaction with the BPH has become a two-way street of information and knowledge, hopefully to the benefit of all concerned.

Then we decided to go public with our opinions and comments on prospective parole commissioners, by testifying at their confirmation hearings. What had once been an sparsely attended event where opposition, if any was voiced, came in the form of 'we don't like Mr. X because he never gives grants,' is now an occasion where the Senators get real information about the performance of potential commissioners. We know, because we're the ones bringing them that information, based not on emotion or even grant rates, but on facts, research and analysis. And it has had an impact.

As more lifers have come home we've begun to establish the same sort of working relationship with Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO) that we have with BPH, and are able to assist you, the paroled lifer, with the tribulations of starting over and dealing with DAPO. Again, this exchange of information and knowledge is facilitated by the appointment of an above-board Director, concerned about the success of parolees and less interested in finding ways to trip them up. DAPO Director Dan Stone has said his agency is now in the business of reintegration, not re-incarceration and while he faces a daunting task in changing DAPO culture he seems committed to the job.

Our first newsletter, **Lifer-Line**, has grown exponentially, and continues to grow due to the help of our volunteer mail tree. Nearly 3 years ago **LSA** assumed the responsibility for publication of **California Lifer Newsletter, (CLN)**, and we have been able to continue providing this much needed resource to the Lifer community. And earlier this year we launched **After*Life**, for paroled Lifers. That's a lot of news and information coming from one small office to a lot of people.

This past year has seen many changes for **LSA**, most obviously the acquisition of an office! This has allowed us to organize (sort of) our files, projects and incoming mail as well provide space for volunteers to help. We've benefitted greatly from the services of our office manager, Robin, as well as Mona, who came to **LSA** after the closing of **Prisoners' Rights Union**. And we get help from time to time from paroled Lifers, including John Dannenberg, Jon Burnight, Todd Ferguson and Emmett Faught—and constant help and encouragement from David Sloane (*my Lifer*) who paroled in 2013 and whose dedication to Lifers still inside has never faltered.

Our months in 2014 were very full—in addition to the BPH Executive Meetings, we have a chair on the Director's Stakeholder Advisory Group (the only prisoner/parolee advocate there), attend Cal. Rehab. Oversight Board (CROB) meetings, commissioner training days, attorney training workshops, and meetings with a variety of legislative offices, BPH and CDCR personnel.

We presented 6 Lifer Family Workshops in 2014, everywhere from Chula Vista to Oakland and were observers at parole hearings in more than a dozen prisons (Pelican Bay, VSP, CCWF, CIW, Solano, KVSP, CMF, old and new Folsom, CMC, Corcoran, San Quentin, Avenal, CHCF and maybe more). And we've had two meetings with the Governor's staff in recent weeks, on the subject of his review of parole decisions. That conversation is in early stages. Many meetings with DAPO staff and administration, legislative offices, family, friends, attorneys and even the media (including several TV news bytes) also fill our days. And follow up on a myriad of issues, from travel pass problems to upcoming legislation are always on the agenda. (Currently over 60 items on our to-do list).

Five years ago we began **LSA**, in all honesty, to help our loved ones. While David and I have been blessed in his coming home, Gail's husband Barry and my nephew, also a Lifer, remain "inside the wire." We know our efforts have been of help to many (we love the letters telling us guys are coming home and that we helped) and we continue to work for the benefit of all, because we know, in helping the many, we are also helping the ones who are closest to our hearts.

We often say **LSA** was started by two pushy broads with no money and no support—we're still pushy broads, but now we do have support, in the form of volunteers, donors and the Lifers who continue to help us identify and address issues of importance to them.

So while we can say Happy Holidays to those of you now outside, we wish the same for those not yet out. No one is forgotten--not LWOP, not those yet to get a date and not those of you no longer, officially anyway, prisoners. We continue to work for everyone—we don't give up and we don't go away.



HELP US CREATE “FROM THE DATE TO THE GATE”

Despite efforts of CDCR and Division of Rehabilitative Programs (DRP) and Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO) to provide relevant programming aimed specifically at Lifers, both still inside and those on parole, the staff and advisors of **LSA** have long thought those efforts were off the mark. While no doubt numerous ‘experts’ were consulted and countless studies studied no one really asked the end user of these programs/services, the Lifers. And never was any curriculum aimed at helping Lifer parolees after they hit the streets.

True, (DAPO) is making some efforts in this area, but they are pretty remedial and still stuck largely on substance abuse treatment/relapse. Which doesn’t apply to all Lifers and hasn’t been really relevant to many more, who have been clean and sober for years. But there are a myriad of other challenges to successful life after *life* and these issues are largely unaddressed.

We know this because we TALK to paroled Lifers and in many cases, we live with them. There are many unforeseen challenges facing those who are returning to the world after decades in prison, and we don’t mean just jobs and housing. So many paroled Lifers have told us of the strange, little everyday things that were both a surprise and challenge for them-- water faucets turning on and off by swiping hands under the tap; that toilets in public restrooms flush automatically; that virtually no one accepts paper job applications anymore; that plastic debit cards make cash almost obsolete. Not to mention those social challenges, like getting used to having the noise, lights, hustle and bustle of everyday life. How about shopping, cooking meals, finding your way around via public transportation; we, and you, could go on and on.

For some time we have been mulling over the need for basic, every day, practical information that would be of real assistance to paroling Lifers as they try to navigate a new world. And we think we know the perfect time to present this information to them—that waiting period between the parole hearing grant and actual release date—the time From the Date to the Gate.

And now it appears we may have the means to follow through. **Life Support Alliance Education Fund** has just received, with great thanks and excitement, a grant from the Ron and Alice Reed Family Foundation, administered by the North Valley Community Cooperative in Chico, to help fund the creation of both curriculum and means of presentation for our pet project.

Now that we are developing the means, and we've always had the will, we're setting out to create the program; and we're asking the best experts we know, paroled Lifers, what we should include. Sure, we'll have the basics on transitional housing, how to get your identification and the like, but while we know many of the subtle challenges and surprises we'd like to hear from those who have recently walked that path.

What gave you the most trepidation about coming home and what have been the hardest adjustments? What areas of everyday life do you feel you were least prepared to tackle? Basically, what do the guys still inside, waiting at the gate, need to know?

If you've found some solutions to problems, ways to deal with stress or found a program or agency that has been helpful, please share. Paroled Lifers, now some 1,900 strong, have a wealth of information on how to start all over again and we want to tap into that wisdom.

Our hope is to be able to present in person, to Lifer and long term offender groups in various prisons—yes, we will travel. And for those institutions that think we're too much of a threat (really, two middle aged women—how threatening can we be?) to allow on grounds, our plan is to produce a DVD, so that we can share, in absentia, what we know.

And we don't plan to be the only stars of this show. Especially in the DVD format we hope to have some paroled Lifers speak directly to those still waiting to come home. Imagine the surprise to your old bunkie or cellie when your face shows up telling them the when and how!

So let us know—the whole purpose of this endeavor is to provide real and practical information and help, and who knows, in the process you just might find ways and resources that will help you too. We're working to prevent everyone, those coming out and those already out, from being broadsided by unexpected hiccups. There are enough of those anyway. And while we're at it, if we can show CDCR and DRP that there is a better way—well, we're not above a little self-promotion.

You can send your ideas, suggestions, any and all feed back to us at this email address, write us at **Life Support Alliance**, PO BOX 277, Rancho Cordova, Ca. 95741 or give us a call at 916-402-3750. If no one answers leave a message and we'll get back to you. And if you're interested in a possible sit down workshop to pitch ideas back and forth let us know and we'll set one up.

This is another chance to give back, to help the guys you, and we, know are ready and waiting to come home.

CHRISTMAS MERRIMENT

"Let me see if I've got this Santa business straight. You say he wears a beard, has no discernible source of income and flies to cities all over the world under cover of darkness? You sure this guy isn't laundering illegal drug money?"

"Santa Claus wears a Red Suit, he must be a communist. And a beard and long hair, must be a pacifist. What's in that pipe that he's smoking?"

"No Nativity Scene in Sacramento---they can't find three wise men."