

# John B

In many ways, John B is a lucky man. In 2010, after several narrow escapes and years of minimizing the compulsive and criminal nature of what he was doing, he was arrested for a serious sexual offense. This time he was caught; he could not talk his way out of it. Facing a real possibility of 25 years in prison, for the first time John understood that he absolutely had to change. No more faking it in therapy while continuing to hurt others and pretending to be a good citizen.

John's process of self-examination and internal change took place over many years, and like all of us he is still evolving. During the process of his trial and conviction, he got a lot of legal help and personal support from his family and a lawyer who believed in him - two of the ways in which he is fortunate - but honest, serious remorse and self-examination, for the most part, came later. This is in part because, unfortunately, sex offender treatment cannot even begin until six years before one's release date.

After four years in prison, which John spent mostly trying to keep busy with work and other programs, he was transferred to the Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC) in Bridgewater, MA. He was about halfway

through his sentence and facing the possibility that his incarceration could be extended indefinitely through the Civil Commitment process - unless he was deemed mentally fit enough to no longer be a danger to society. Like those

around him at the MTC, John desperately wanted to be out of prison, but he struggled to be open and honest until he met another inmate who needed his help. John found that in helping this man, Ray, express his

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feelings and thoughts, John in turn could share his deep feelings and secrets with Ray. This enabled both to share more

deeply with the treatment groups, and over time, as they trusted each other, they began to trust the process. Both men were released, both have been successful clients of Baystate Reentry Network (BRN), and they continue to support each other.



BRN worked together with John's lawyer during the process of getting released from the MTC and helping get him on his feet with seemingly simple things we don't think much about, like getting a state ID and then his license, starting a bank account, and obtaining and using a smartphone. During John's first months out, he worried a lot about how he was going to cope, and the moral support he had from his family and BRN was very important. When he had problems with Probation, BRN was there to help.

## Bay State Reentry Network

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The Baystate Reentry Network (BRN), formally known as the Boston Release Network, is a dedicated group of volunteers helping individuals involved with the justice system and their families successfully navigate the transition back into the community upon release from incarceration.

Our program connects returning citizens with mentors that have similar backgrounds navigating a successful return to the community after involvement in the criminal justice system. This shared life experience uniquely positions our mentors to credibly relate to program participants and fosters trust and accountability.

With a client-driven approach, our volunteers engage participants to establish trusting relationships and facilitate a path forward based on an individual's needs. Our volunteers assist with pre-release planning, help returning citizens establish community supports, and work with their families to prepare for a participant's return.

## JOHN B (CON'T)

Then, six months after being unemployed due to the Covid pandemic, he got a job at Newmarket through BRN's contacts there. BRN's support network there has helped several people; for John, being hired at Newmarket during the pandemic was a life-changing event – the beginning of his comeback.



John is lucky to have a family who support him and continue to help, financially and personally. Some of his old friends have also stood by him (though he has lost others); John is not sure where he would be now if none of that were true. Many people who have been convicted of a sexual offense have lost everything and feel alone in the world, which is why the support of organizations like BRN is so crucial. There is a path back to life, and you are not alone!

John has some advice for others in his situation: *Be Honest* (but not foolish), *Don't Burn Bridges*, and *Take the Job*. When he was looking for an apartment, he told the landlord he had a criminal history – which meant that when he was “outed” by a spiteful neighbor, he was not kicked out. Although it was scary to see posters in the neighborhood detailing his crime and pointing out where he lived, there was not a lot of fuss and it soon died down. Many people, it seems, believe in second chances. *Be honest.*

John does not blame those of his friends who cut him off, and he deeply appreciates those who haven't. Many people need time and distance before they notice someone's recovery, and even those who never do should not be written off. John has changed; others do too, and even people who can't be friends do not have to be enemies! His being able to stay in his apartment after being attacked was partly because he has

been an exemplary tenant and neighbor. *Don't burn bridges.*

Facing typical difficulties for those formerly incarcerated, it took John a year to find his first job after release, in a restaurant. The restaurant closed because of the Covid pandemic and it took another year to find another job. He now works full-time in Boston's meatpacking district, where the work is hard and draining. Work plus two therapy sessions a week, probation, medical appointments and seeing a few family and friends, never mind finding time to eat! – is plenty for now. John has the time he needs to continue understanding himself. He looks forward to a better future – deeper friendships, more fulfilling work, more money to support his dreams – but right now he wouldn't change a thing. *Take the job*

