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Justice De Muniz, Members of the Commission, my name is Dustin Gollyhorn and I am a trained leader with PHOENIX and MACG.

I grew up in a low-income family where crime was the way of life. Despite this setback by birth, I did fairly well in school, especially in art. However, being poor and very unsupported by my community, as a young man I felt compelled to return to my roots . . . a life of crime.

Eventually, I got arrested and was taken to jail.

As I settled into my new life as an inmate, I talked to my peers. One man, Lance, slept in the bunk next to mine. In talking with him, he told me that he'd been to prison ten times.

While I waited for the 150-month Measure 11 sentence deal I was forced to accept, I spoke with more men and found out that Lance's story was all too normal for people like me. Seeing this, I became scared and very depressed about my future.

Being aware of all the negative influences in prison, I decided to be different and stay positive. I stayed out of gangs and thereby, trouble - but in that I was a huge minority. Most of my Measure 11 peers do just that – enter gangs, and thus a continued life of negativity and crime once they get out.

For myself, to break that statistic, I turned to a disciplined spiritual path. But I also simply aged and matured. This happened naturally and gradually. I was 20 when I went in, 33 when I got out. But it also took a conscious effort and firm resolve on my part. Prison-mandated programs couldn't help me, and they do next to nothing for my peers. What was helpful was building relationships.

Luckily, in my last years, I found PHOENIX. This brought me into contact with community member volunteers like Sister Dolores Quinn. She supported me in my spiritual discipline, even though I'm not Catholic. More importantly, she treated me like a real person, and this helped me to feel like a real person again. Relationships like this have followed me even after I came home from prison.

Since I've been out, it's been hard. The world moves very fast. But my connections with PHOENIX, and especially with my mentors, have kept me balanced and sane. Without the support of this community, I don't know if I could've made it even through the first day.

Now my outlook on my future is very comforting – even encouraging. But I know I'll need the constant supportive compassion of my friends, family, and especially from the community at large.