



# the Green sheet

## Service to others is his mission

Follow the rules. Secure a job. Keep a job. Stay positive and focused. Become a law abiding citizen. Make the changes necessary in your life to prevent your return to prison.

When an offender adopts this mantra and becomes an example for others to follow, his life develops into a successful parole supervision story.

Wayne Rucker is that offender. He was paroled in 2013 and is now on special probation until 2020. His story was recently featured on the Habitat for Humanity website that was shared by his last supervising agent, Agent Owens in the Philadelphia Northwest Division.

The following is the article in its entirety from the Habitat for Humanity newsletter.

*“Wayne Rucker, 28, works for Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia through the AmeriCorps program. As part of the Pennsylvania’s affiliate’s Weatherization and Home Repair Program, he helps low-income homeowners with projects ranging from replacing roofs to insulating windows and painting porches.*

*Rucker overcame many obstacles to get here. He was raised mostly by his grandmother, and spent time in foster care and juvenile institutions. As a teenager, he ran away and began living on the streets.*

*‘I always was a problem child,’ he said. ‘I was suspended from school about 180 times.’*

*Between the ages of 18 and 21, Rucker was arrested several times on drug charges and other offenses. At 22, he was sentenced to five years in prison on weapons charges.*

*When he got out of prison in 2013, he vowed not to fall back into his old ways.*

*‘I knew I wanted to be something better,’ he said.*

*AmeriCorps, in partnership with EducationWorks and the Philadelphia Youth Network, had just launched a new initiative in Philadelphia called PowerCorpsPHL, combining environmental stewardship with intensive job placement support for young adults in need of direction.*

*Rucker was in the first PowerCorps class, which planted trees, revitalized green spaces and worked on watershed preservation. He said he connected with nature in a way he never had before.*

*‘It helps me get a greater perspective on life,’ he said.*

*When Rucker finished his PowerCorps class, he went straight into the AmeriCorps program with Habitat for Humanity.*

*‘When I came home from prison, I did a lot of reconstruction on myself, to get rid of the old me,’ he said. ‘It takes a whole lot of energy and drive and determination to reconstruct yourself as a new person. But that’s what I did.’*

*Through serving others, he found himself.”*

Mr. Rucker is currently a construction repair crew leader for Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia. He also runs a non-profit

organization, Akbar, Inc., which focuses on helping ex-offenders get on a positive track in their lives and stay there. He is also available for speaking engagements.

"I cannot be credited with Rucker's success. He has had several agents that have assisted him on his path," Owens said. "When he was transferred to me, his business was established, his housing was approved, and he had just been hired to work with Habitat for Humanity.

"I encouraged Mr. Rucker to continue to follow his dreams. We have had several conversations about his specific goals and about life in general," she said. "Mr. Rucker is always willing to talk through his feelings and emotions, something that he admits is very difficult for him, in order to make better decisions."

Agent Owens shared one very specific event that was grounds for several conversations with Mr. Rucker, and she encouraged him to move forward with her moral support.

"Mr. Rucker was very fearful of, and at that same time excited about, moving into his own apartment," Owens explained. "This was the first time that he'd lived alone and having his own apartment was a big deal."

Agent Coleman, who supervised Mr. Rucker in Philadelphia before she transferred to the Butler Sub Office, recognized the significance of Mr. Rucker's living environment as one of the keys to his parole success.

"When I met him, he was already residing at the homeless shelter. I asked if he had any family living in the local area and he shared with me that he could live with his mother. However, he knew if he put himself back into the environment where he grew up (southwest/west Philadelphia), his ability to change his life would be limited and he would likely fall back to his old behaviors," Coleman explained.

"The positivity and enthusiasm that Mr. Rucker displays is actually contagious," Owens said. "His positive attitude and willingness to learn and grow made supervising Mr. Rucker a good experience. Supervising parolees like Mr. Rucker helps to balance my job given that agents see so much negativity."

Agent Coleman stated that Mr. Rucker hated prison and shared with her that he felt he was too young to end up like so many other young, black men in Philadelphia. She said Mr. Rucker knew he had to take positive action to break the cycle and bring change into his life.

"In order to put the plan he devised for his life while in prison into action, Mr. Rucker opted to put himself in a situation where he had nothing except social welfare and donations to make it through. Everything he owned came from the local missions or Goodwill.® He had limited articles of clothing to wear, but took pride in his ability to

"Service is one of the things that keeps me alive."

~ Wayne Rucker



mix and match the items so people would not necessarily know he was wearing the same clothes time and again," said Coleman.

Both Agents Owens and Coleman stated that they worked with Mr. Rucker on his "people skills" when he came in contact with people in the community. Agent Coleman explained the perceptions others had on Mr. Rucker's self-reports.

"He was so positive and forth right [about how he was doing and what he was accomplishing on supervision], people thought he was 'show boating,' 'bragging' or 'narcissistic,'" Coleman said. "I had to explain to him what narcissism is.

"It is important to understand that as a Muslim, Mr. Rucker embraced his humility and although he might not have always seemed humble in these self-reports, he was working to help the greater good as his religion intends," Coleman continued. "Mr. Rucker embraced that his faith was his saving grace and it spilled into every aspect of his academic, professional, and personal life because in his interpretation of the faith...community is everything."

Both agents agree that it was, and is, Mr. Rucker's positive attitude, determination and his faith that turned his life around.

"Mr. Rucker found the intestinal fortitude to overcome the socioeconomic barriers that oftentimes prevent success. He had no money, no earthly possessions, and a felony criminal record yet has found greatness because he wanted to serve as beacon of light to a community and population of young and old black men who think the odds are against them," Coleman said.

"On numerous occasions while under my supervision, Mr. Rucker was responsible for organizing various political functions and/or fundraising programs," Coleman concluded. "He received numerous awards for his community based actions.

"He was probably one of the most dynamic offenders I ever met."