Appleseed’s work to confront Alabama’s overreliance on prisons and punishment and provide evidence-based solutions for a brighter, safer way forward is going stronger than ever.

2022 has been a year of unprecedented growth at Appleseed. Our small team has doubled in size, with offices in Montgomery and Birmingham and remote staff in Selma and Piedmont. I’m proud of what we have accomplished, including:

- Securing a win in the Alabama Legislature with the passage of HB95, which gives people leaving prison a grace period of 180 days to begin paying court-imposed fines and fees.
- Launching a campaign to end poverty-based driver’s license suspensions so Alabamians can get back to work and support their families.
- Publishing *A Bitter Pill*, original research on the human and economic toll of the opioid crisis in Alabama.
- Winning the release of 80-year-old Robert Cheeks, who served 37 years in prison for offenses with no physical injury, and filing resentencing petitions for three more elderly clients.
- Creating a re-entry program called *Fresh Start*, that provides support to people leaving prison as they transition to a second chance at life.

It’s gratifying to celebrate these accomplishments. But the reality is that Alabama’s criminal punishment system remains mired in cruelty, violence, and indifference. Record numbers of Alabamians died of homicide, suicide, and drug overdoses this year in state prisons that the U.S. Department of Justice declared unconstitutional nearly four years ago. Increased public safety will remain out of reach until our elected leaders address this crisis with real change. Not bigger prisons.

For 20 years, I’ve been in the trenches fighting for criminal legal reform in Alabama. There is no doubt – we are making progress. And yet, shameful, inhumane conditions in our prisons and jails, predatory policing in low-wealth communities, lack of investment in community-based solutions outside of prison walls, and racial bias across the system persist.

Appleseed’s Community Navigator, Callie Greer, often speaks to people who have survived terrible violence and implores them: “Don’t waste your pain.” Her words ring true for all of us fighting for more justice, more equity, and more freedom. The terrain here in Alabama is rocky for sure, painful at times. Much is at stake, and that’s why Appleseed will continue our laser focus on Alabama’s toughest problems.

Thank you for standing with Alabama Appleseed as we work to bring more justice to all Alabamians.

In gratitude,

Carla Crowder
A BITTER PILL

Every year from 2012-2020, Alabama ranked first in the nation for opioid prescriptions per capita. Since 2014, the opioid crisis has claimed the lives of nearly 7,000 Alabama residents who died by overdose, and disrupted the lives of countless more. Appleseed’s latest report A Bitter Pill examines how the combination of harsh criminal laws, the nation’s highest opioid prescription rate, and Alabama’s under-resourced jails and violent, dysfunctional prisons mean that many of the people who need treatment most are not getting it. Instead, they are dying preventable deaths in record numbers. Something must change.

UNSUSTAINABLE

Unsustainable focuses on the soaring number of older, incarcerated people in Alabama and the economic impact of their incarceration. Older prisoners have quickly shifted from a small group on the fringes to nearly a quarter of Alabama’s entire prison population. Appleseed examines the repercussions of policy decisions that condemn thousands of Alabamians to prison until they die.

Visit bit.ly/appleseedreports to see all of our research.

Alabama Appleseed celebrated some wins during the 2022 legislative session.

The Grace Period bill, HB95, passed and gives people leaving prison 180 days post-release before they have to start paying back court-imposed fines and fees. Alabama is now the second southern state to pass such a bill.

Additionally the driver’s license suspension bill came just one vote away from becoming law after passing out of three different committees and passing unanimously on the Senate floor with bipartisan support. After coming so close to making a difference for the 170,000 Alabamians with debt-based license suspensions, we’re not giving up and plan to push for driver’s license reform again in the 2023 session.

Speaking of 2023, Appleseed has four main legislative priorities for the upcoming session including: (1) Ending driver’s license suspensions due to the inability to pay fines and fees; (2) eliminating fines and fees in the juvenile court system; (3) creating resentencing opportunities for older people serving life without parole for crimes with no physical injury; and (4) providing state funding for re-entry housing services for formerly incarcerated individuals through a partnership between the State Bureau of Pardons and Paroles and Aletheia House.

Join our Action Alert Network to keep informed on Appleseed issues during the legislative session & beyond!

bit.ly/AppleseedAction
"As the Assistant Vice President for University Outreach and Public Service at Auburn University, I am charged with forging and facilitating connections between the university and the community that enhance the quality of life for Alabamians and beyond. I deeply appreciate Alabama Appleseed’s partnership in supporting our mission by engaging us in a project to support the financial health of returning citizens. Last year, Appleseed presented Auburn University with an opportunity to participate in a collaborative with the Financial Health Network to overcome barriers that previously or currently incarcerated individuals experience in securing government-issued identification cards.

Thanks to this connection, we were able to host convenings with stakeholders that resulted in remapping our state system and securing 52 identifications for this vulnerable and disenfranchised population. Through the convenings, we supported partnerships between state agencies, learned how to activate the ALEA mobile unit at institutions and realized the impact these identifications can have on the future of justice-involved youth.

Alabama Appleseed not only serves as a champion for the justice-involved but motivates institutions and individuals to advance this important work. For better or for worse, my eyes have been opened to the elements of our system that are clearly broken. Thanks to Alabama Appleseed, I am intently motivated to engage where I can and when I can." - Hollie C. Cost

Appleseed continues to advocate for men sentenced to die in prison and is investigating dozens of cases where individuals are serving sentences much more severe than what they would face today.

In response to the growing need, Appleseed developed a new re-entry program called Fresh Start, as our clients transition to their newfound freedom and a second chance at life. These men leave prison with nothing and support is desperately needed to live productive, meaningful lives after decades in violent, chaotic prisons. Thus, our work includes connecting our clients with re-entry supports such as housing, job training, counseling, medical care, and more in the first critical weeks of release. We were fortunate to hire client Ronald McKeithen, who served 37 years in prison, as our Re-entry Coordinator and welcome Kathleen Henderson as our Re-entry Case Manager.

Robert Cheeks, who was originally sentenced to die in prison under Alabama’s Habitual Felony Offender Act for a 1985 robbery conviction, was released on time served on July 22, 2022 after being represented by Alabama Appleseed. He is Appleseed’s eighth client - originally sentenced to life without parole - to be freed. Mr. Cheeks walked out of Donaldson Correctional Facility at 79 years old after 37 years of incarceration.
Bill Passed in 2022
The Grace Period bill gives people released from prison 180 days before they have to begin paying back fines & fees

1

Number of clients who voted for the first time in 2022
* Special thanks to the Greater Birmingham Ministries Voter Restoration Program

3

Number of films made about Appleseed's work & people

75

Number of community events, presentations, panels & special events that Appleseed staff have organized or served on in 2022 (& counting!)

309

Number of justice-involved people who have contacted Appleseed seeking legal help

400.1

Number of hours of re-entry client services through our new Fresh Start program

4

Number of clients who received keys to their first apartments

100%

AL state lawmakers contacted by constituents through Appleseed

*Join our Action Alert advocacy list at bit.ly/AppleseedAction

51,359

NUMBER OF WORDS WRITTEN BY OUR RESEARCH DIRECTOR LEAH NELSON

Donate to Appleseed
Thank you for standing with us to build a better Alabama! You can donate to Appleseed in one of the following ways:
- Through the above QR code
- Mail a check to Alabama Appleseed using the enclosed envelope or to 2 Office Park Circle, Suite 10, Birmingham, AL 35223
- Online at bit.ly/DonateAppleseed
- Through your employer's matching funds. Ask them!
- Designate "Alabama Appleseed" on Amazon Smile
Appleseed Staff

Carla Crowder, JD  
Executive Director  
Superpower: Finding lost things, & people

Leah Nelson, MS  
Research Director  
Superpower: Shamelessly bringing homemade cookies to meetings I expect may be challenging.

Frederick Spight, JD  
Policy Director  
Superpower: Envisioning what can be in places and spaces which many have written off.

Elaine Burdeshaw, MSW  
Policy Associate  
Superpower: Disarming people with slightly pokey jokes & banter when necessary.

Eddie Burkhalter  
Researcher  
Superpower: Semi-competent home electrician (except for three-way switches. I’ll never get those right) & curious about everything and everyone

Megan Cheek  
Communications & Development Manager  
Superpower: Multi-tasking mama & purveyor of rockstars everywhere

Scott Fuqua, JD  
Staff Attorney  
Superpower: Patience

Kathleen Henderson  
Re-entry Case Manager  
Superpower: Connection & compassion

Callie Greer  
Community Navigator  
Superpower: Nurturing & caretaking

Alex LaGanke, JD, MPA  
Staff Attorney  
Superpower: Foresight

Ronald McKeithen  
Re-entry Coordinator  
Superpower: My ability to express what’s in my heart and on my mind.

Libby Rau  
Legal Assistant  
Superpower: Observer of details & celebrator of justice

Dana Sweeney  
Statewide Organizer  
Superpower: Making people feel hopeful about the future of Alabama!

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Poverty is not a crime. But in Alabama, people who lack access to wealth rarely experience equal justice under the law. Since 2017, Appleseed’s Research Director Leah Nelson has documented the ways in which Alabama’s two-tiered criminal legal system means that people with access to wealth fare far better than those who lack it.

Appleseed’s research led to an investigation into the town of Brookside, Alabama that put the small city on the map as one of the worst speed traps in America. In 2022, AL.com broke the story of how the city’s aggressive policing tactics, which included the use of unmarked vehicles and officers who operated well outside of the city’s police jurisdiction, resulted in a 640% increase in revenue from fines and forfeitures between 2018 and 2020. Arrests skyrocketed during those years, and the city became notorious for the long lines and abusive practices at its municipal court. By 2020, fines and forfeitures comprised 49% of the city budget.

Aggressive reporting on Brookside netted positive results. In 2022, amid bipartisan calls for accountability and reform, state lawmakers swiftly passed two pieces of legislation aimed at deterring predatory police practices. One caps the percentage of a municipality’s revenue that can come from traffic fines at 10%. The other requires municipalities to report information about revenue from tickets, along with data about their budgets and certain expenditures, to a statewide database.

Watch the film at bit.ly/PulledOverPulledUnder