

Somdeng Danny Thongsy is an MTC alumnus who was formerly incarcerated, low-income, and a first-generation college student at UC Berkeley majoring in Sociology. I served 19 years of a prison life sentence as a youth offender. Outside of school, I am a community advocate fighting for criminal justice reform and immigrant rights.



I am honored to be a recipient of the MTC 10,000 degree scholarship. I was sentenced as a youth offender to serve 27 years to life. Due to California laws changing for youth offenders, I was granted parole.

I was paroled and transferred to ICE for deportation. I was then paroled to a transitional/reentry house in Concord, CA called Rowland's House, run by California Reentry

Institute (CRI).

Being a low-income, first-generation college student, and a formerly incarcerated person of color, this scholarship gives the holistic support I need to help me navigate through my academic studies.

I believe this is a very important scholarship that can help formerly incarcerated and low-income people. Sharing information about this scholarship in the San Quentin News or MTC website and newsletter can help spread the word.

Without support, transitioning back into society after being incarcerated can be very challenging. The trauma of incarceration is another challenge. Then you have family reunification, old habits, old friends, old neighborhoods, technology support, financial literacy, relationships, and the need to stay focused and accountable.

I was fortunate to have peer support and community in my reentry. Just to name a few, Asian Prisoners Support Committee, Asian Law Caucus, Bonafide, California Reentry Institute, Laney ROC, and MTC.

A good parole plan and community/peer/mentor support in reentry, help with keeping me accountable. I did not need to be placed in a blackout time period or in a transitioning house with too many restrictions that prevents me from slowly adjusting back to life in society.

Also, I did not need to be paroled straight to my family, but rather to a transitional house first, because my family has their own struggles and was not ready to receive me back yet.

When I walked out of the prison gate towards freedom, it was an exciting feeling, and also nervous/shocking. Life in prison operates slowly, but in society, things move at a rapid pace: the cars, noise, people, and the surrounding.

The trauma that still lingers is the side effect of incarceration on my mental and emotional health. Sometimes, I still feel hyper-vigilant when walking around areas that feel sketchy. I feel some level of depression at times, and some level of ADD.

I do not miss being incarcerated, however, I have formed relationships with people, and the bonds and connections that we built, I miss that. Some of the things I've learned from incarcerations are time management, discipline, and structure. I can always incorporate that into my life today.

I transitioned out of my job last summer. Currently, I am a full-time student at UC Berkeley. The first job I had coming home was with the Asian American Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus doing criminal justice reform and immigrant rights work.

I obtained my DMV and other documents and benefits with the support of reentry personnel.

I really appreciate the scholarship and reentry support. Where I am in life today is because of the help and support I received along the way.

With this, I am humble and appreciative.