



Bio: Susan Burton

Following the tragic accidental death of her five-year-old son, Susan Burton's world collapsed. Her loss snapped the final tether of resilience, already strained by a past of pain and trauma. She descended into an emotional abyss of darkness and despair, yet was not offered the resources needed to heal. Without support, she turned to drugs and alcohol which led to nearly 20 years revolving through cycles of incarceration.

Drawing on her personal experiences, she founded [A New Way of Life Reentry Project \(ANWOL\)](http://www.anewwayoflife.org) in 1998 — dedicating her life to helping others break the cycle of incarceration. ANWOL provides resources such as housing, case management, employment, legal services, leadership development and community organizing on behalf of, and with, people who are struggling to rebuild their lives after incarceration.

Susan is widely recognized as a leader in the national criminal justice reform movement. A past Soros Justice Fellow, Women's Policy Institute Fellow and Community Fellow under the California Wellness Foundation's Violence Prevention Initiative, Susan has served on the state's Little Hoover Commission and the Gender Responsive Strategies Task Force. In recognition of her leadership, she was appointed by Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas as a member of the Los Angeles County Sybil Brand Commission for Institutional Inspections. In this role she is authorized to inspect Los Angeles County correctional facilities and advocate for the health and well-being of people housed there.

Susan is a co-founder of All of Us or None (AOUON) and the Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People's Movement (FICPM), both national grassroots civil rights movements comprised of formerly incarcerated individuals, their families and community allies. In collaboration with UCLA's Critical Race Studies Program, she launched an employment rights reentry legal clinic, which has grown to be the largest of its kind in Southern California.



Susan has earned numerous awards and honors for her work. In 2010, she was named a CNN Top Ten Hero and received the prestigious Citizen Activist Award from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She is a recipient of both the Encore Purpose Prize (2012) and the James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award (2014). In 2015, on the 50th Anniversary of Selma and the Voting Rights Act, Susan Burton was named by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of eighteen new civil rights leaders in the nation. Released in 2017, her memoir, [*Becoming Ms. Burton*](#), received a 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in the category of Biography/Autobiography. *Becoming Ms. Burton* is also the recipient of the inaugural Goddard Riverside Stephan Russo Book Prize for Social Justice. In 2019, Susan received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from California State University, Northridge.

Susan had 11,000 paperback “prison edition” copies of *Becoming Ms. Burton* published in 2017, which ANWOL has sent free of charge to any prisoner who requests one. Since then, Susan has also traveled into jails and prisons in 30 states and three countries, speaking with prisoners and prison officials and delivering copies of *Becoming Ms. Burton*.

Since ANWOL’s founding, more than 1,000 women and children have found safety and support in seven reentry homes. Over 300 women have been reunited with their children. Through a household goods distribution center, more than 3,500 formerly homeless individuals have been able to acquire items needed to establish their own homes. Since its inception in 2007, ANWOL’s legal department has provided pro bono services to assist thousands seeking relief from the burden of criminal histories. Those services have helped enhance job opportunities by expunging criminal records and offering access to occupational licenses. As a result of leadership building activities, hundreds more have been educated and empowered to speak in advocacy around issues that directly affect their lives.

Susan Burton is leading an initiative to develop a replication model to assist other communities with providing culturally authentic reentry supports to assist individuals with histories of incarceration and/or convictions.