

NFL FOUNDATION AND PLAYERS COALITION
NAMED APPLESEED'S 2022 *PILLARS OF JUSTICE*

WASHINGTON, DC – In 1984 Ronald McKeithen was sentenced to die in prison for a convenience store robbery in Birmingham, Alabama. No one was physically injured in the robbery, and no shots were fired, but life without parole was the mandatory sentence under the state's "three strikes" law. Ronald spent 37 years in prison until Alabama Appleseed took on his case in 2020 and won his release.

"I had given up hope of ever living a life outside those prison walls," Ronald McKeithen, who last year joined the staff of Alabama Appleseed as the center's Re-entry Coordinator and Advocate, said. "I don't have words strong enough to thank the people who stood by me and believed in me. Now I'm helping men who I served time with once they walk out of those prison gates and using my experiences to provide hope and stability to our clients."

Ronald's freedom, and Alabama Appleseed's advocacy challenging the state's "three strikes" law, was made possible by the NFL's *Inspire Change* initiative, a collaboration of the NFL Foundation and Players Coalition that showcases how players, owners, and the league work together to create positive change in communities across America.

On September 14, the Appleseed Foundation will present the 2022 Pillars of Justice Award to *Inspire Change* for their work with Alabama Appleseed, Texas Appleseed, and other nonprofits. Since the launch of the initiative in 2017, the league has provided more than \$244 million in grants to social justice organizations.

"We are immensely proud of our work with Alabama Appleseed and Texas Appleseed, and thrilled to be named Appleseed's 2022 Pillars of Justice," Anna Isaacson, the NFL Senior Vice President for Social Responsibility, said. "Our work with Appleseed shows the incredible power of collaborations to reduce barriers to opportunity. We are grateful for everyone who is working to build positive change for communities."

"Supporting social justice reform at the grassroots level is imperative when fighting against systemic injustices," said Players Coalition Task Force member Kelvin Beachum. "If we truly wish to inspire change within our country, we must continue to support organizations like Appleseed and raise awareness around their work in these underinvested communities. Now is the time to be on the forefront of change."

Appleseed is a network of 18 justice centers across the United States and Mexico working together to reduce poverty, combat discrimination, and advance the rule of law. Appleseed centers unite research, organizing, policy advocacy, and impact litigation to build systemic solutions for their communities' most pressing problems. The Appleseed Pillars of Justice Award is presented annually to leaders who have shown an extraordinary commitment to the public interest.

"It has been truly inspiring to see the impact of the NFL's *Inspire Change* initiative," Mary Morningstar, the Co-Chair of the Appleseed Foundation Board of Directors, said. "When I see the smiles on the faces of Ronald McKeithen and the other men Alabama Appleseed has helped free from prison, I know Appleseed's work is making this a better world for us all. It is a great honor to present the 2022 Pillars of Justice award to the NFL Foundation and Players Coalition."

More information is available at www.AppleseedNetwork.org.

The 2022 Appleseed Pillars of Justice Celebration is generously sponsored by:

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