



## HEAR FROM HER

# Natalie Baker

**System Impacted Women Speak Series  
Brought to you by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition**

In prison, it's a different way of life, and you have to adapt in order to survive. When I got out, I found I'd forgotten how to function like a normal person in society – how to eat, how to sleep, how to make decisions on my own. If I hadn't found a good therapist specializing in post-traumatic stress, I don't think I'd be the person I am today.

The system doesn't prepare you for freedom. For the first few years after release, the most difficult aspect was living with the felon label. As a convicted felon, you are forever a second-class citizen, and the social stigma against you is a very real thing.

Basic civil liberties, housing and certain career paths are suddenly off-limits. Even with my law degree and MBA, it took me a year and a half to get a full-time job, a hardship I was entirely unprepared for.

Soon after I was released, I served as the Executive Relations Manager of the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), a nonprofit dedicated to rehabilitating prisoners and reducing Texas' recidivism rate. I then moved to San Diego to live with my now-husband, where I currently do business development/legal affairs for a litigation support firm, as well as freelance for several companies on the side. We also recently welcomed our first child – a little girl!



## Do people compare your experience to Piper Kerman's (of Orange is the New Black)?

**Of all the questions I receive about my prison experience, I probably get asked about Orange is the New Black the most. I read her book my first year in and can relate to the whole being-thrown-into-a-foreign-world thing, especially after having come from a relatively privileged life. I can also identify with the amazing people she befriended, because the bonds you make in there truly keep you going.**

**But, for as much as we had in common, our prison experiences weren't identical by any means. State prison (where I was) is a whole different animal compared to the federal system (where she was).**

**For more information about women in Texas' criminal justice system, visit [TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice](https://TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice)**