

Basketball 'Family Day' returns

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

San Quentin's Basketball Program held its second annual Family Day at the prison on Aug. 26, hoping to inspire those still in the prison who are searching for guidance. The Basketball Program's Family Day serves as a beacon of hope — for residents and players alike.

As part of the event, 14 formally incarcerated people revisited the prison as free men, shining a light on freedom and success — stemming from their involvement in the SQ basketball program — for all to see.

"I hope that the administration can see how good this program is doing so we can take it to the next step," said longtime volunteer Bill Epling.

Epling, along with another longtime volunteer, Don Smith, are the glue that holds the program together. Epling and Smith are instrumental in the basketball program's success.

"We want the program to be recognized just like those other self-help groups are," Epling said. "The basketball program has helped many guys change their lives for the better."

San Quentin's Basketball Program Family Day has always highlighted the bond that incarcerated athletes have with outside volunteers, who also play important roles in keeping the program alive, according to the program's

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SPECIAL ISSUE: MENTAL WELLNESS WEEK



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

SAN QUENTIN CELEBRATES ANNUAL MENTAL WELLNESS WEEK

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

On September 15, San Quentin's Annual Mental Wellness Week culminated with a plethora of activities around the prison organized by a collaborative mental health committee comprised of staff and residents.

Leading up to the final day, speakers and activities throughout the week raised awareness about mental health and the importance of reaching out for help when needed. This message is especially timely, given that people continue to suffer silently under the burden of mental health issues, too often succumbing to the tragedy of suicide — inside and outside the walls.

"I think it is important for us to support each other," said Dr. Anderson, SQ's suicide prevention coordinator. "It is great to be there for someone, and this event is just that."

The week's events were designed to be inclusive for the entire population as reflected by the slogan, "You belong and you matter."

At the prison's Garden Chapel, the San Francisco

Giants' mental health team kicked off the week by speaking about ways to cultivate mental wellness through positive self-talk.

The week also featured a variety of musical performances — from Alive Inside to an Expressive Arts Night. Some of the audience's favorite performances were by members of San Quentin's deaf community, including a rapper and comedians.

"I'm excited to support mental health and suicide prevention, to help others stay positive," said Jaime Paredes, a member of San Quentin's deaf community.

Besides the popular dunk tank on the baseball field, programs set up tables to provide information to residents about their services, while question-and-answer sessions were held hourly in nearby classrooms. SQ's veteran groups drew a crowd by hosting a 22 push-up challenge to raise awareness about the 22 military veteran suicides that occur everyday across the nation.

"People think mental health is for the weak, but it's actually takes a strong person to take care of their mental health," said lead psychologist Dr. Rachel Chen. "It's important to break down the stigma."



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Dunk tank, pg 12.



Jennifer Shaffer returns, pg 14.



Expressive Arts Night, pg 16.

New graduate program makes dreams come true for incarcerated students

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

A groundbreaking new graduate school program is giving incarcerated people a rare opportunity to earn their master's degree while they serve their time in prisons across California.

The invaluable opportunity is being offered through the Master of Arts in Humanities program at CSU Dominguez Hills. The program is for incarcerated people who already have a bachelor's degree, whether earned while in prison or on the outside. Two San Quentin residents were selected to be part of the first cohort of 31 graduate students. Their journey to earn their master's degrees began on Sept. 5, 2023.

"I was truly grateful at how synergistic the subject matter is with my life journey. The timing was fortuitous," said Anand Jon Alexander, one of the SQ students.

The man behind this innovative, graduate school initiative for the incarcerated is Matthew Luckett, chair of the program, also known as the HUX Program. Luckett told *SQNews* that he was excited to be able to offer incarcerated students the opportunity to continue their educational journey and take it to a new level.

"We want to showcase what the humanities can do through you guys and your accomplishments, to help transform people," Luckett said. "The broader world needs rehabilitation and people inside can help with that transformation."

Luckett was pleased to report that the HUX Program had recently completed a memorandum of understanding with CDCR to offer its graduate program at any prisons that can accommodate online, distance learning through the department's Wi-Fi enabled laptops. For enrolled students, laptops equipped with the online-college software Canvas LMS are provided by CDCR.

"We faced challenges, finding that pathway forward, especially since we are doing something so new and unique — the first distance program authorized to use CDCR tablets — and we're excited to see where this leads," Luckett said.

The original HUX distance-learning program was created in 1973 but closed in 2016. However, Luckett explained that they still have a number of formerly-incarcerated faculty.

"We've learned a lot over those 40 years, and also during the pandemic, and we've optimized and taken advantage of that to make our new program better," he said.

The humanities are defined as knowledge relating to philosophy, literature, and arts concerned with human culture and thought, in similar fashion to sociology.

Within this broad definition, "The HUX program takes a powerful constellation of disciplinary tools and focuses them on a small number of important subjects, such as mass incarceration and urban development," according to

See **MASTER** on pg 4



Dante D. Jones // SQNews

SF District Attorney's office visits San Quentin

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

On September, 2023, San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins visited San Quentin, along with an entourage of assistant district attorneys and community advocates. The purpose for the DA's visit was to consult with incarcerated people about ways in which to prevent youth crime.

Jenkins, who is known for being tough on crime, entered the gates of SQ with a bright smile, a bright pink suit and a pink logo on her black Nike tennis shoes. The towering public figure strolled into Garden Chapel

A, shaking hands and engaging with the people in blue. "People think I'm mean and that I never smile, but I'm actually very nice," said DA Jenkins. "I am not as bad as the media paints me to be."

A group of more than 30 incarcerated people awaited the DA and her group inside the chapel. The people in blue spread out sitting down next to the 15 district attorneys and community advocates, rather than across from them.

Among the assistant district attorney's was Tiffany Sutton, formerly of the San Francisco Police department. "I was here in 2019 with Chief

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NORWEGIAN
OFFICERS COMES
TO SAN QUENTIN

—STORY ON PG 03

SCOTT BUDNICK
COLLABORATES WITH
YOUNG SQ
FILMMAKERS

—STORY ON PG 10

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San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins, assistant district attorneys, staff, and community partners, walked to SQ's Lower Yard as part of their tour.

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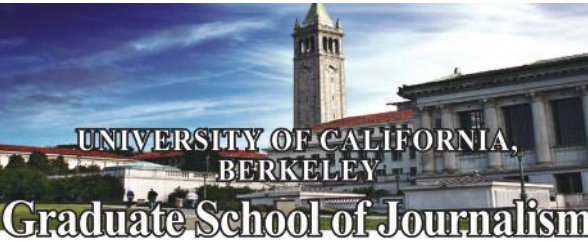


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PROFILE

“Never doubt the impact of your voice and your story. Never let others define you by your worst mistakes.”
—Chesa Boudin



File image

Boudin becomes founding executive director of the Berkeley Criminal Law and Justice Center

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

With his shadowy beard and wide smile, former San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin stands on the edge of the Lower Yard’s track at San Quentin. He is dressed in the signature black T-shirt worn by the 1000 Mile Club’s volunteer running coaches. He has a pencil and a piece of paper in hand recording the laps of runners as they log miles on the quarter-mile circular track. As runners go by, he shouts out times and cheers them on.

Boudin said he was inspired to volunteer as a coach after seeing the documentary film, “26.2 to Life: Inside the San Quentin Prison Marathon.” As a runner, he believes running has the power to reshape people’s lives. When he’s not volunteering at SQ, he is at UC Berkeley helping to shape the minds of the next generation of legal practitioners.

The former district attorney is now the founding executive director of Berkeley’s new Criminal Law and Justice Center, launched by the law school’s dean, Erwin Chemerinsky. Boudin was chosen as the best candidate for the job after a nation-wide search.

The new center acts as a research and advocacy hub designed to help boost Berkeley law’s public mission in the criminal justice arena, according to the Chemerinsky. It also helps foster research collaborations among faculty members and others, as well as enhancing law students training and practice opportunities.

“We’re building connections between academia and the wider world,” Boudin wrote in an email to *SQNews*. “Through innovative research, empirical analysis, and policy advocacy, we aim to tackle deeply embedded inequities to affect meaningful change.”

Boudin served as the 29th district attorney of San Francisco. He is a Yale University graduate. He is also a former public defender.

As district attorney, he was labeled soft on crime by critics because he did not believe in giving people life sentences for strikes on shoplifting and using drugs. He did not believe in using limited resources prosecuting crimes such as public camping, offering or soliciting sex, public urination, or blocking a sidewalk.

Those same critics leveraged news foot-

age of brazen, daylight smash-and-grab looters hitting high-end stores to get him recalled. In 2022, Boudin was replaced by San Francisco’s current district attorney, Brooke Jenkins, who helped spearhead the campaign to have him removed from office.

Solving San Francisco’s crime problem is proving to be just as tough for Jenkins as it was for Boudin. Violent crime rates rose during the first 11 months that Jenkins took office, with a 12% increase in robberies and a 1.6% increase in assaults, according to the *San Francisco Standard*. The city is also on track to have its deadliest year of opioid overdoses.

Drug sales and violence is a problem that has not been resolved in five decades of the “War on Drugs,” despite an estimated \$1 trillion dollars spent fighting the war, according to NPR news. Harsher penalties and longer prison sentences have done nothing to neutralize the drug problem Jenkins is now grappling with.

“The legal realm can sometimes become detached from the realities of everyday life, creating a gap between expertise and lived experiences,” Boudin told *SQNews*.

Boudin believes that law schools should take a holistic approach by building curriculums that combine traditional legal education with practical insights. “Law schools can empower students to challenge norms and advocate for marginalized communities,” he said.

“I’m dedicated to expanding access to justice, leading community initiatives that facilitate healing post-incarceration, curbing recidivism through innovative diversion programs, and elevating the overall integrity of law enforcement,” Boudin said. “Collaboration is at the core of my strategy.”

Another important component of advocating for marginalized communities is understanding adverse childhood experiences, which are often at the root of criminal behavior along with economic disparities, according to Boudin.

“We have to weave trauma-informed approaches into robust diversion programs and nuanced forms of accountability,” he said. “The goal here is to not just reduce recidivism but also equip individuals with the tools to process, heal, and ultimately transcend the complexities of their past. Only then can we create space for genuine healing and growth. Only then can we truly

be safe.”

Boudin wants to see more investment in prevention and healing, not just punishment. That means three things in Boudin’s mind. First, decarceration and eradicating racial bias in favor of accountability that addresses root causes.

Second, expanding services for those who have been harmed by crime, instead of just “telling them to be satisfied with a pound of flesh in a punitive system.”

Finally, promoting a system of equal enforcement of the law so that it isn’t only the poor and marginalized who are held accountable, but also the powerful and well-connected when they break the law.

“A fair legal system is fundamental to a just society and the rule of law, ensuring that we stand on equal footing before the law, regardless of our background or means,” he said. “A system that privileges the few undermines the basic values that America is supposedly built upon.”

For Boudin, “True justice allows people to live in a society without the specter of personal harm or property loss.”

He considers it to be essential to a healthy society that fear takes a backseat to trust and facts, where every person can move forward to reach their full potential with confidence in the fairness of the institutions that govern us.

He noted that the progressive DA movement has been a powerful force in reimagining a prosecutor’s role and daring to challenge the status quo by calling for alternatives to excessive incarceration and placing restorative practices at the forefront.

All of this, he said, will help to “pave the way toward a society that champions empathy and justice, shifting the focus from punitive measures to holistic approaches that prioritize the well-being of individuals and communities with policies grounded in data and compassion instead of anecdote and fear.”

By volunteering inside of a prison as a running coach, as well as by having parents who were incarcerated, Boudin is in a position to be in close proximity to those with valuable lived experience who can help inspire a better future for criminal justice in America.

“Never doubt the impact of your voice and your story,” advised Boudin. “Never let others define you by your worst mistakes.”

San Quentin News

EST. 1940

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REIMAGINING SAN QUENTIN

NORWAY COMES TO SAN QUENTIN

Officers from Norway visit
SQ to discuss new California
Model with SQ's IAC

By Dante D. Jones
Staff Writer

On August 25, San Quentin's entire Inmate Advisory Committee joined an impromptu meeting with Ronald J. Broomfield in his role as CDCR's newly appointed director of Adult Institutions to discuss major changes for incarceration in the state.

"I respect the man, so I believe whatever is about to be discussed, we're willing to listen and be open to dialog," said IAC Chairman Cainen Chambers.

Broomfield was accompanied by Acting Warden Oak Smith and Dr. Brie Williams. As founder of the non-profit organization Amend, Dr. Williams, who is a Professor of Medicine for Vulnerable Populations at UC San Francisco, helped to connect CDCR officials with correctional staff in Scandinavian Countries.

Also at the meeting were three individuals who at first glance could have been mistaken for firefighters. As it turned out, they were representatives of the Norwegian Correctional Service.

Principle Officer Kenneth Jasson, and training supervisors Tonje Culbertson and Simon Loekken, came with Broomfield and Smith for a roundtable discussion about reimagining corrections in California.

The effort is part of a comprehensive plan that, as Gov. Gavin Newsom explained, is "focused on improving public safety through rehabilitation and education via a scalable 'California Model' that can be utilized across the [state]," according to *The Davis Vanguard*.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand — from a grassroots level —incarcerated perspectives of what this plan should look like. They also talked about some of the training that the Norwegian officers were offering to CDCR.

"They have been at Gult [the name of CDCR's officer academy] for the past week giving staff training and ideas on how to implement the 'California Model' and how to move this throughout the entire CDCR," Smith said.

Williams noted that eight prisons across California have sent delegates to Gult to receive this training so far.

The conversation was a lively yet intimate discussion on how the nature of incarceration in California affects everyone involved — incarcerated people and correctional officials alike.

Chambers expressed the vital importance of "buy-in from both sides," said that he believes his job as the IAC chairman is to help the population at San Quentin implement Director Broomfield's and the governor's vision for the transformation of California prison culture.

Even though San Quentin has been working towards a rehabilitation-focused approach to incarceration for some time, Norway's prison culture differs greatly from the overall prison culture in California — or for what is typical across the United States, for that matter.

Culbertson explained that her country of Norway and its prison system went through huge changes starting in the 1970s.

"We knew we had to change, so we got new laws, new training," she said. "There's a thing we like to say in Norway: 'You go to court to be punished. You go to prison to become a better neighbor.'"

Loekken, who has worked for the Norwegian Correctional Service for nine years, said it is his

job to train new staff to treat the incarcerated as human beings first.

"We train them for two years in our correctional university," Loekken said. "The university also has a point system that allows the officers to further their education in mental wellness and learn how they can help an incarcerated person reenter society in a healthy and positive way."

He explained that they have no automatic promotional process based on seniority. To move up to any senior position, "you have to apply and be interviewed."

Jasson, a 33-year veteran of the Norwegian Correctional Service, said one of the laws that his country changed was to abolish inhumane conditions within its carceral system as part of a complete overhaul.

"We changed our logos, we changed our laws, our policies. ... Not all agreed with it at first, but through the years, things began to change," he said.

As part of that change, they reclassified their employees. Once called Correctional Officers, they are now known as Contact Officers. They even changed their insignia from prison bars and the Norwegian word *fengelsesvesen*, which loosely translates to "criminal service," to a symbol that represents holding hands with the words *kriminal omsorgen*, or "criminal care."

Jasson said his country's job of improving its prison system is far from done. He believes it takes both sides working together — no matter what the country — to change the system. He emphasized that both sides, as human beings, need to remember they are all more or less the same.

After about 40 minutes, there was a serious shift in the conversation that led to difficult questions being asked. Chambers shared that some officers have told him they feel administration does not want to hear from them. He thinks that sentiment "can breed resentment and can ultimately harm us, them, and the building of this model."

"Some officers — and even wardens — will be hell-bent on not complying with the new process. How do you deal with those types of staff?" he asked.

Smith answered that there is a "process to deal with staff — from disciplinary action to reprimands."

"But we've been talking to staff constantly about where CDCR is moving and encouraging them to buy in and get on board with this new way. We know that it's gonna take some time, but we are moving in the right direction."

Culbertson then talked about a 30-year veteran CDCR officer who attended the recent training at the Gult academy. "He fought the training really hard. But after a few days in, he softened and began to see the value in it," Culbertson said.

An IAC member asked a question that addressed the on-going rumors that lifers will be excluded from participating in the California Model program.

"Let me state outright that this is not a 'program' but a mission to change CDCR for the better," Broomfield said. "Everyone will have the opportunity to take part in this change."

Another IAC member asked whether the correctional officers' union is "on-board" with the change.

"I believe that they are," Broomfield replied. "There's so much benefit to a correctional officer to support this: less suicide,

Photos courtesy Warden's office

Top: Acting Warden Oak Smith, Director Ron Broomfield, and Dr. Brie Williams pose with the Norwegian officers outside of Tower One.

Middle: Norwegian officers tour South Block's Dining Hall.

Below: The guests get a taste of one of SQ's notoriously small cells.

less divorce, less stress, etc."

"Yes, I would agree," Williams added. "I've talked to many of the leadership and they have expressed to me that they are willing to help this model move forward."

"All the wardens are either going to be committed to this new way or they are not going to be wardens," Broomfield said.

After the meeting ended, Broomfield took the Norwegian officers on a tour of San Quentin.

Donner housing unit's Lt. Haub was one of the staff who attended a training session with the Norwegian officers.

"I was a little apprehensive about the whole thing at first," he said later.

Haub went in thinking they were going to tell him he had to be "all kumbayah-like." He said that after he spent a few hours with the trainers, he began to "understand the logic in what they were teaching."

"Look, 99% of you guys are going to be getting out one day and may be my neighbor," he said. "I want to be able to invite you over to the barbecue because

I feel safe around you and you around me. It's up to us [officers and incarcerated persons] to help facilitate that trust."

JENKINS

Residents share their experiences on what could be done to help at-risk youth

Continued from page 1



Jenkins listens intently as incarcerated residents share their insight.

Scott and hearing peoples stories was so impactful,” she said. “I knew I needed to bring this new cohort of district attorneys inside. It’s important that the new DA be fully informed by those closest to the problem. You never know where you will get a good idea from.”

Vince O’Bannon hosted the event. O’Bannon is a native of San Francisco and the assigned staff photographer for *SQNews*. He started the event by having everyone introduce themselves and by having the incarcerated people speak openly and candidly about their crimes.

Afterwards, O’Bannon asked everyone in the room to participate in a moment of silence for the victims and survivors of crime. You could hear a pin drop for almost 20 seconds.

Lt. G. Berry the Public Information Officer for San Quentin also attended the first half of the event. She describes herself as a “native San Franciscan.”

“I am new to my position and I haven’t participated in many of these type of events, but I think it’s important to have dialog between the incarcerated and community about public safety,” she said.

After the big group, participants enjoyed Starbucks coffee and donuts before breaking into smaller groups for discussion about the problem of youth crime and disparate sentencing.

Oak Smith, the acting warden took time out of his busy schedule to join the circle with DA Jenkins. The groups discussed creating jobs for formerly incarcerated people at the DAs office to help with community engagement. They also discussed easing restrictions on formerly incarcerated entering youth facilities to speak to the youth. There was discussion about mentorships programs, community self-help groups and youth field trips. There was also talk about helping youth process and understand trauma beginning at age 5. The age at which most felt trauma begins to most often surface

Jenkins also brought up the topic of mental health and searched for a way to reduce the stigma of the word so that youth could be reached. Warden Smith introduced the phrase mental wellness into the circle.

“Mental wellness is a term I’m going to take away from today,” said Jenkins.

As the event came to a close, DA Jenkins stepped inside of the circle and again stated: “I am not mean, she said laughing. “I am a nice person.” She also gave some parting words.

“You guys are so intelligent,” she said. “I see and hear so many smart people in this room and one of the things I’m shocked by is the amount of time some of you received for your crimes.”

One of the people Jenkins was referring to was incarcerated person Jemain Hunter. He received a 9-year sentence for attempted murder and an additional 25-years for using a gun during the commission of the crime.

Jessie Milo also told his story. He received 174-years plus six life sentences under California Three Strikes law, for three counts of attempted murder committed at age 22.

Jenkins said that she is going to allow her assistant district attorneys to come back inside and agreed to come back herself to have more discussion about sentencing disparity and how to find solutions to problems facing youth.

Incarcerated person Kevin Sample also gave some closing remarks. “We don’t just have potholes in our streets, they’re potholes in people’s lives. We have to help fill them,” he said. “Being willing to take the shoes off our own feet to help another is important.”

This is the first time since 2018 that district attorneys have entered San Quentin to talk about public safety with the incarcerated. The last district attorney to sit down with the men in blue was Jeff Rosen of Santa Clara County. Rosen was so impressed with people’s stories, he helped secure one incarcerated persons release—*SQNews* former editor-in-Chief Arnulfo T. Garcia.

This meeting resulted in a first-of-its kind law for prosecutor-initiated resentencing.

“I had preconceived ideas before the DA’s arrived,” said O’Bannon. I believed they were just coming in to exploit us in some way. However once we sat down and I heard them speak, I felt they genuinely wanted to include us in the conversation. The genuinely wanted to hear our voices.” The meeting ended with a traditional group photo.

“Today we dispelled the myth of us against them,” said O’Bannon. We are all one community and we must work together to solve the problems in our communities.”

MASTER

Rare opportunity for incarcerated to attain prestigious master's degree

Continued from page 1

the student guide.

Graduate students are empowered to choose their own research topics and “find their own interests and passions.”

One of these students is Alexander. He spoke about the environmental and racial justice aspect of the program, and how important these issues are because they are “woven into the fabric of the American journey.” He added that getting into “activism is powerful and important no matter what situation we are in, including being incarcerated.”

Alexander is using his life-experiences, his success, and failures to inspire his capstone study.

“My research is consistent with my own life mission, in terms of racial justice and anti- misogyny, of which we are either victims of or enablers of. I plan to write a book on these issues in the fashion industry because in the industry those things are rewarded. I can help address these things since I worked in that industry,” Alexander said.

The other SQ graduate student is Bertho Gauthier, who said he is “super grateful” to have such an opportunity while incarcerated because it is so rare. “This will broaden my horizons, help me to make indirect amends,” he added.

For his capstone, Gauthier plans to research the “psychology of punishment and how in the history of America we’ve done different types of punishment, including alternatives to mass incarceration.”

In Luckett’s view, even with society’s current focus on science, technology, engineering, and math, the humanities are essential for helping everyone understand the value of cultural literacy, the value of knowing our history. “Humanities have taught these things for centuries,” he said.

Research has shown that giving incarcerated people an education is one of the most powerful interventions to ensure their success after prison. A 2018

study by the Rand Corporation found that people who participate in correctional educational programs are 28% less likely to recidivate. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy reports that college courses for incarcerated students has a return on investment of nearly \$20 for every \$1 spent.

Luckett said there is no formal funding mechanism to pay students’ tuition, but thus far the Department of Rehabilitation — a separate agency from CDCR — has provided crucial support by allowing HUX students to apply for a scholarship. As part of the scholarship application, a representative from the agency interviews students via their prison’s education department through a Zoom video call. If selected, the scholarship covers the full cost of textbooks and tuition.

The HUX Program is open to incarcerated people in all California state prisons with education departments and a CDCR laptop program. This includes, among others, Chuckwalla, Lancaster, Mule Creek, Solano, Avenal, Folsom, R.J. Donovan, Stockton, and San Quentin state prisons.

Pre-application packets are sent out in October of each year, which are due at the end of the following January. If pre-selected, students will then need to submit a full, CSU application with transcripts that is due at the end of May.

“I am so happy and blessed to have the opportunity to do this work,” Luckett said. “I am happy because of how the humanities have empowered me to do these things with my career that I never envisioned. The humanities are greater than the sum of its parts.”

Qualifying students interested in the HUX Program and receiving a pre-application packet can send a “letter of inquiry” to:

Matthew Luckett, HUX Program, CSU Dominguez Hills, 100 East Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747



Dao Ong // SQNews

HUX Program master's students Bertho Gauthier and Anand Jon Alexander.



Building foundations for wellness

By Stuart Clarke and Harry C. Goodall Jr. Journalism Guild Writers

The Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment (ISUDT) program’s “Incentive Celebration” was held on September 15 in San Quentin’s gymnasium as part of the last day of Mental Wellness Week.

In attendance were numerous ISUDT counselors, mentors, program participants, and residents. Everyone enjoyed table games, basketball, and table tennis. Karaoke was the most popular attraction.

“If it wasn’t for this program, I’d still be a knucklehead,” said resident Sean Casteen, who is now in the ISUDT Offender Mentor Certification Program. “I like helping others and watching when they get their ‘ah-ha’ moment of the full impact of their crime.”

OMCP mentor Todd Winkler said his job is “to ask the right questions and help them cultivate their own answers.”

“There is a lot of therapeutic value in groups,” said staff counselor Joseph Pinkard. “I see a sense of better understanding of life situations.” Pinkard added that event is a “great opportunity to separate the stigma of mental health and to bring awareness to say it’s OK to have mental health issues.”

Program Director Lance Bohn was also present.

“The cognitive-behavior intervention program addresses life skills and substance use disorders,” he said. “These can include chemical dependency, process addictions, and other behavioral issues.” Speaking about ISUDT,

he added that he thinks “it’s foundational for the treatment and rehabilitation of incarcerated people here at San Quentin.”

Staff counselor Stephanie Sanchez said the event is “a great opportunity to expand the awareness of mental health.”

“It’s a good program,” stated resident Timothy Martel, who completed ISUDT last year. “Anger management helped me the most, and the parenting class helped me with my relationship with my daughters.”



Sampablo Aristeo // SQNews

Friendly ISUDT mentors passing out information at the celebration.

Transitions Clinic Network visit San Quentin

By Andrew Hardy Staff Writer

Obtaining insurance coverage and connecting with a primary healthcare provider may be two of the most important — and most daunting — challenges parolees face, especially for those who have served decades in prison, according to Beth Divakaran and Anna Steiner of Transitions Clinic Network.

TCN’s answer? Community healthcare workers.

“Community health workers sort of walk beside you to get you what you need,” Steiner said, adding that they provide one-on-one guidance to help make a success on parole a reality.

Divakaran and Steiner visited San Quentin to host several small group discussions during Mental Wellness Week.

For Steiner, this is familiar ground as she used to work at The Q pairing residents with health resources before their parole. Her work at TCN is a natural continuation of the same purpose.

“Healthcare in the community can be hard to navigate,” Steiner said. “When people come home, healthcare may not be first priority. Housing, employment, and transportation are central to a parolee’s success, of course, but TCN also emphasizes access to mental and medical health services, substance use treatment, healthy food, and getting exercise.”

Steiner explained that community healthcare workers are themselves formerly incarcerated, which helps understand the needs of the newly released as they navigate returning to their communities.



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

GRADUATION

Latest cohort of Coalition for Justice honors success in graduation

Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Participants, program leaders, facilitators, mentors, and outside volunteers gathered in San Quentin’s Alcohol and Recovery Center building to celebrate residents who completed the rigorous social justice training program aimed at eliminating prejudices within and beyond prison walls.

Coalition for Justice is a four-month course that meets three days a week. As preparation for successful reintegration into society, participants learn to appreciate diversity and approach those differences through non-violent conflict resolution.

Brady Godoy said he will take the tools he received from the class way beyond his time here at San Quentin. He is reminded of what it takes to impact those who face injustices. He talked about the knowledge he received from the class.

“This class is a good reminder of the hard work it takes to maintain a just society. I became motivated to see that all walks of life receive justice.”

Before the ceremony, the 20 graduates had one final check-in to express the impact they experienced from being a part of the program. Steven Clark, Afif Boukdoud, and Randolph Payne were re-



Coalition for Justice's graduates smile proudly during their ceremony and hold up their hard-earned certificates.

leased prior to the ceremony. The remaining 20 took turns checking in.

Graduate Patrick Demry said that through the program he learned the tools to help him challenge his belief systems, tools he can carry with him outside of prison.

“While in prison I picked up many prison beliefs and this class was one of the catalysts for my change. One of the greatest things about change is being able to go outside of your comfort zone.”

Inside facilitator and program president, Arthur Jackson, emceed the graduation.

His fellow facilitators spoke on what the class meant to them and how the program has helped encourage open participation and honesty.

Steve Drown is an inside facilitator who thanked participants for allowing him to have a part in their ability to reevaluate situations. “Now you are able to go out and facilitate change and know what you are doing,” said Drown.

“Coalition for Justice is a model about how you have difficult conversations,” said facilitator Bruce ‘Brother Jay’ Bowman. “I learned how

to sit, wait, and watch as magic happened in the group.”

Inside facilitator Terry Winston talked about the relationships he built, calling the group “family oriented.”

“This group of guys, you made it easy for me. When I see you across that yard, it is just that encouragement that you all give me,” he said about the relationships that he has maintained.

Mentor Thomas Denove shared Winston’s sentiment of having a safe space to work in. Denove talked about growing up in the program, and how initially he was

skeptical in the space.

“I feel totally safe in here with you and that is what makes this work so well. This cycle changed my life. Coalition for Justice is a candle that you have to let shine,” said Denove.

Outside volunteers Nathaniel Moore and Karen Lovass have co-coordinated the program since 2017. They commended graduates and facilitators for their perseverance and collaboration during Covid.

Harry Goodall is one of the inside facilitators and the program’s vice-president. He

recognized the outside volunteers for their continued support during those modified program days.

“They didn’t give up on us,” Goodall said.

Moore gave thanks to inside facilitators and mentors for their continued perseverance. He appreciated and agreed with the group regarding the magic that happens organically in the circle sessions, even during modified programs at the facility.

“All y’all kept showing up. To stand here today and hear of how it all went is a testament to you all,” said Moore.

Mentor and facilitator Joseph Ratti talked about the information he has gained while in the program and the ways he is going to apply it when he is released.

“This group has helped me to interact with tough situation a lot more efficiently. Patience, how not to be frustrated because someone else is disagreeing,” said Ratti.

Lovass noted that seeing collaboration among participants demonstrates tremendous possibilities for the future.

“There are a lot of challenging things happening outside. I think that together we have a great chance for a better future.”

After the ceremony graduates mingled while enjoying snacks and sodas.



Twenty-five SQ residents mark the first post-Covid CGA graduation. In honor of the day, graduates were treated to sandwiches, chips, and drinks.

Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous graduations are back

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Dozens of incarcerated persons assembled in San Quentin’s Chapel B August 25 to receive certificates and celebrate the first Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous graduation since 2019.

CGA works with participants to deconstruct and understand destructive behaviors and distorted belief systems that lead to criminal thinking. The group works on the premise that anyone can change by taking accountability for the damage that came from their addictions and anti-social lifestyle.

Although CGA models itself after traditional 12-step recovery programs, it differs in its focus on the impulsivity of decision-making, the impact of crime on victims and their families, and on the way offender choices affect the community.

Marcy Ginsburg, an outside facilitator for seven years, shared how the stories, the heartaches, and the authenticity of the participants inspire her to keep coming into San Quentin.

“Greatest thing about being a part of CGA is witnessing change,” Ginsburg said. “Regardless of the past, everyone can change and learn to be somebody who is a good parent, neighbor, or outstanding member of society.”

Ginsburg praised the graduates for taking the opportunity for self-improvement and shared the

Albert Einstein quotation “In the middle of a difficulty lies opportunity.”

The group’s chairperson Carlos “Coach” Smith has participated in the program for five years. He shared with *San Quentin News* how CGA assisted him in transforming his thinking and his thought-parameters, which helps him in his interaction with others.

“CGA helped me go to the heart of why I committed my crime, my criminal thinking, and addictive behaviors,” Smith said.

Smith opened the ceremony with the serenity prayer. He spoke words of encouragement and told the graduates that he was proud of their commitment to the program.

A video of former chairperson Corey Willis explained the way his criminal thinking perpetuated his gang life, which led him to kill a person. Willis said that in a “mini-doc” by San Quentin Media Center’s *Forward This*, he expressed, “Our choices are decisions that shape our future.”

Born into generational gang membership, Milton “Tone” Alcantara revealed that he had embraced the gang lifestyle with open arms. He said that in his early childhood, at perhaps age six or seven, he recalled imagining his future life in prison. “When I came to prison I was at a loss, and I had an identity crisis,” Alcantara said.

He said that he had meshed right into CGA and easily related with

others in the group. “CGA helped me with my growth [from an old tough-guy persona] and opened my eyes to damage I left behind,” Alcantara said.

Shane Goddard shared with *SQNews* how CGA is a large factor in his life, beliefs, and in his personality. “No matter what part of the cycle of criminal thinking I am in, I use CGA’s tools to keep me away from anti-social thinking,” Goddard said.

Facilitator Ginsburg provided Subway sandwiches, chips, and drinks. Residents Timothy Young and Gregory Thompson provided entertainment with a guitar-and-drum performance, and Charles “Pookie” Sylvester performed a comedy skit on stage.

Graduate Jad Salem’s experience with the program helped him get insight about the origins of his beliefs. Honesty remained a key for him as he talked about how he adopted false personae and how “CGA helped me find my true identity,” Salem said.

CGA facilitators expressed their gratitude and offered words of encouragement to all participants. Congratulations went to Joe Hart, Joe Tyes, Ellis Hollis, William Hearn, Kevin Robinson, and Shane Goddar, six residents who have participated in the program since before COVID-19. The CGA mantra closed out the ceremony, “One Less Criminal, One Less Crime, and One Less Victim.”

Program created by SQ resident spreads healing

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

A new program offers fresh concepts to residents of San Quentin focusing on public safety and inter-generational trauma. Participants will learn key elements in areas like domestic violence, intervention techniques, and gang awareness.

The program, Emotional Awareness Therapy, consists of 12 carefully crafted modules currently available to people incarcerated at San Quentin and has a waitlist of over 400.

Harry Goodall, founder of the program and a resident at San Quentin, discussed EAT as an evolution from a book that he authored called *“Learning To Heal.”*

“Someone told me I should write a question booklet, but I knew there was so much more to share,” Goodall said.

Goodall joined the Peer Literacy Mentor Program where he learned the Madeline Hunter lesson-planning techniques for instructors.

“My instructor taught me that in order to be a good mentor, I needed to address my biases and remove any blocks from my potential growth. Then COVID hit. This was an eye-opener. I knew what could be created by the PLMP program,” Goodall said in an interview with *SQNews*.

viduals teach others using real life testimonies of their criminal thinking to stop perpetuating violence.

“Many incarcerated people never learned to talk about the trauma they’ve experienced. EAT agrees with the philosophy that hurt people hurt other people and people aren’t born to be criminals,” Goodall said.

The participants will learn through breakout groups, class discussions, and independent study the following key concepts:

- Domestic Violence
- Alcohol Addiction
- Gang Awareness
- Educational Trauma
- Self-Care
- Mental Wellness
- Community Building
- Code Switching
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Cognitive Distortions
- Relationship Building
- Mindful Meditation

Incarcerated people will train in the fundamentals of emotional intelligence. Having the necessary tools when returning to the outside, those released from incarceration can teach the program at high schools and afterschool programs.

Chris Gonzales, a resident and facilitator with the group, noted his experience as a kid without a program like EAT and the impact this program would have made on his life.

“I wanted to challenge myself. I had a fear of public speaking. It was something I knew I needed to overcome,” said Gonzales. “When I was in high school they didn’t have anything like (this). I like the concept about going into high schools, getting the message across to youngsters. So, this would definitely be a challenge.”

EAT helps trauma-impacted indi-

Program graduates can participate in a Facilitator In Training program, which can lead to employment after they are released. The goal of EAT is to become a necessary program in other prisons, juvenile halls, and being recognized as a court-mandated diversion program.

This program is designed to allow people who have caused harm to reset their footprint by teaching them to heal.

“The adage of life lesson passed down through our lineage has died with patriarchs or matriarchs passing on,” said Goodall. “This has left an emotional awareness gap in each future generation that has come.”

PROGRAMS

AIDA: Peer-led program graduate first cohort

By Anthony Manuel
Carvalho
Staff Writer

On August 19, the Awareness into Domestic Abuse program completed its first in-person graduation at San Quentin. In doing so, AIDA became the only peer-led program at San Quentin's Rehabilitation Center that emphasizes transforming perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse.

Nationally, AIDA reports that one in three women and one in four men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. AIDA strives to reduce domestic abuse by creating a safe space for participants to address denial, minimization and adverse character defects related to domestic violence. The program encourages participants to grow through taking accountability and responsibility in their relationship dynamics.

Incarcerated resident Jorge "Junior" Ramirez said AIDA's culture could transform entire families, beyond the benefits to individual participants.

"AIDA was extremely good to me. I made fun of groups [before] but coming together as family men for 13 weeks, discussing real topics, real emotions, and being transparent changed my perspective," Ramirez said. "I now understand the importance of being open and learning about healthy relationships."

Incarcerated resident Floyd Collins and his wife Vanessa started the program. AIDA and has grown from just five resident participants at Soledad State Prison in 2014 to class commitments at CTF Soledad and Mule Creek State Prison and now, San Quentin. Beyond the class of 30 graduates in AIDA's first class at SQ, there is an additional 26 participants in a second group in SQ's Earned Living Quarters.

"AIDA has had close to 1000 students who have learned about transforming



John Lui // SQNews

30 graduates were celebrated for completing a 13 weeks in-person course on Awareness into Domestic Abuse program, the only peer-led program at SQ that emphasizes changing perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse.

from abusers to loving members of their families," Floyd Collins shared.

Today, Floyd Collins leads AIDA-SQ as he prepares to go home after 27 years of incarceration for a crime where his power and control issues in a domestically violated relationship led to murder in his previous relationship.

"You found comfort in each other and accepted the message of AIDA, which resonates through you," Floyd Collins said at the AIDA ceremony. "Our hope is to become a yearlong course, but today we are celebrating this group of 30 men who become part of the solution in eliminating domestic violence."

Incarcerated speakers included graduates Saul Cedillo, Roland Cardiel, Paul Hinojosa, Jose Ramirez and

Deandre Ramirez. Each graduate shared how their beliefs changed through the new class.

"I thought domestic violence happened only in our Mexican culture," Cedillo said, reflecting on the global impact of domestic violence. "I now understand domestic violence happens worldwide."

Cardiel spoke of one of the courses modules that centered on individual values.

"I didn't view love, loyalty or respect in my original core values like most of you, and that hurt me," he shared. "Today, I have love, respect and loyalty to AIDA that shines a light in me."

Hinojosa said AIDA reinforced his familial beliefs and provided insights that led to his assisting a fellow SQ resi-

dent in distress on the Lower Yard.

"I would never have done that without AIDA," said Hinojosa.

Vanessa Collins shared that just after the organization officially became a nonprofit in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic forced AIDA to pivot their program model and offer courses by correspondence instead of in-person classes.

"We did not slow down, we created 'AIDA by Mail' in 2021, and that program is in all of CDCR," said Vanessa Collins.

The Collins family thanked Michael Beaudette and Steve Warren, who were vital to starting AIDA-SQ, and Olegario Ambriz, who established 'AIDA in Spanish.' They also thanked Warden Broomfield, and Lieutenant

Gardea. "Without them, this important topic does not get addressed at the incarcerated level," Floyd Collins said.

AIDA-SQ has flourished in part due to its two core volunteers, Amanda Weitman and Michael Burnell. At the ceremony, Weitman spoke of AIDA participants rising above their failures.

"You have truly determined healthy relationships are built on values," she said. "Understanding failure can positively change your sense of power and control, thereby empowering you to excel and move forward."

Michael Burnell, the sole male volunteer for AIDA-SQ, has volunteered at SQ for 19 years and shared how domestic violence affected his life.

"Each week here I continue to get more from you

men than I learned anywhere else," said Burnell.

The accolades concluded with graduation certificates, snacks, and final words of wisdom from staff and volunteers. Floyd Collins challenged graduates to carry the mantle of the program with them beyond the classroom.

"Keep talking about domestic violence as if someone's life depends on it," he said, "because it probably does."

To inquire about
AIDA's correspondence
programs,
or just to learn more,
please write to:
AIDA
PO Box 5323
Sacramento, CA 95817

HEART graduation just in time for October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

During the second annual Healing, Empowerment, Accountability, Restoration, and Transformation celebration, 44 residents were commended for completing the intensive 26-week course known as the Domestic Violence Batterer Intervention Program.

HEART is the acronym for the program that teaches incarcerated folks about the connection between childhood traumas, domestic violence, accountability, restoring relationships, unhealthy vs. healthy relationships and self-care.

"One of the first things I learned is that we all have basic human needs. To be seen, feel safe, understood, heard, felt that I matter, loved, valued, respected, and connected to other people and that resonates with me, said graduate Gregory St. Mary.

St. Mary went on to talk about the value of having relationships with other people and the impact of understanding past selfishness, criminal mindedness, and the fact that he wants to become a living amends for his

victim. This program offered him a way to heal and start making amends.

"I learned about my selfishness. I see how I hurt somebody. I know that it occurred from my criminal mindedness. (The program) was an opportunity to heal myself and make amends."

Program Director Cherie McNaulty welcomed everyone and citing statistics of those affected by domestic violence during her opening ceremony announcement.

"1 in 3 people have experienced, seen, and have been part of DV in the world and 87% who experience DV will be impacted by the justice system. All of you got heart. I am here because of you, you guys are what make the program happen," said McNaulty.

The graduating class of 2023 joined the already 70-plus alumni to be advocates against domestic violence within the community both inside and outside these walls.

Outside guest speaker Mick Gardner acknowledged the perseverance and dedication needed to attend all the classes and the work it involves. He shared what domestic violence looked like in his household as a kid.

"I know that you know,

that I know that you know... because you have it within you to overcome any difficulties you have had. In order to overcome all of that, you have to be able to look at things through a different lens," Gardner said.

In an interview with SQNews staff, Cherie noted the theme of this celebration as the past, present and future noting the way to end domestic violence is by educating people. She added

that we should see ourselves as human, start having self-love, and then we can grow to break the cycle so that others don't suffer how she did.

Over 70 alumni fill the seating area on the right side of the chapel. The other 40 graduates took up seats on the left side of the room. Cherie calls all of the facilitators to the stage so that they can present the certificates to the graduates.

Inside facilitators Ian

Hamilton, Dennis Jefferson, Jorge Ramirez (Spanish translator), Rafeal "Nephew" Bankston and Carlos Smith talked about what HEART means to them and how it has impacted their lives.

Dennis Jefferson has been involved in the program since 2019. In his speech to the graduates, he addressed bad habits taught to him about relationships, empathy, love, and male dominance. He equated his life growing up

to an experiment where people wore inverted glasses that gave them a distorted vision of life.

"Soon their vision began to adapt to the crooked surreal life. That represented my life throughout the '90s." He said the vision of "hyper masculinity" summed up his life.

Jefferson expressed that HEART taught him the difference between a man and a male. He never thought his past shielded him from culpability and accountability and believe that shame carries an inner monologue.

"Shame says 'you went too far this time and there's no coming back from what you've done, you don't matter, stay small, you are the problem you've created' but it is within us to turn our hard chapters into a story about redemption, repentance, and comebacks," said Jefferson.

As they enjoyed baked chicken, white rice, salad with croutons and cherry tomatoes, coffee and cherry juice, Cherie walked around with the microphone and allowed individuals to share whatever they wanted about each other or the program experience.

"Change always begin with self. Know thy self, be thy self, and Love thy self," said Cherie.

Graduates by last name:

Jose Acevedo, Christopher Anderson, Rubens Angeles, Adan Arriaga, Luis R. Ayala-Soto, Michael Beaudette, Daniel Birdsell, Ronald Bratton, Antoine Brown, Jeffrick Brown, Santiago Castro, Demetrius Clay, Burgess Cosby, Fernando Escobedo, Damou Evans, Jorge Franco, Raymon Gaddis, Shane Goodard, Augustine Godoy, Harry Goodall, Raul Higgins, Mario Infante, Raymond Jones, John Krueger, James Montgomery, Dale Moore, Jerry Pitts, Jorge Ramirez, Shawn Rankin, Carl Raybon, Baldomero Reyes, Luis Rodrigues-Ponce, Clarence Scott, Marquez Sherouse, Miguel Sifuentes, Gregory St. Mary, Gregory Stephens, Victor Torres, Casar Nava, Melrolondo Warren



LAW & POLICY

Racial Justice Act delivers hope to the wrongly convicted

By Jared Rudolph
Contributing Writer

Rudolph is a staff attorney for The Freedom Project at the SF Public Defender's Office. This article provides information to increase incarcerated persons' access to the Racial Justice Act.

Starting on January 1, 2024, people in prison who were sentenced before 2021 and whose cases are “final” may challenge their convictions and sentences under the California Racial Justice Act (Pen. Code, §§ 745, 1473(f)). A successful RJA claim can vacate or modify a conviction or sentence. An RJA claim cannot result in a longer sentence. (Pen. Code, § 745(e)(2).)

What is the Racial Justice Act?

The RJA says, “The state shall not seek or obtain a criminal conviction or seek, obtain, or impose a sentence on the base of race, ethnicity, or national origin.” An RJA claim exists where:

1. Any party — judge, DA, defense attorney, police, expert, juror — exhibited bias against you because of race, ethnicity, or national origin (§ 745(a)(1));
2. Any party used discriminatory language about your race, ethnicity or national origin, whether or not purposeful or explicit (§ 745(a)(2));
3. The prosecution sought more severe charges against you than against members of another race, ethnicity, or national origin (§ 745(a)(3));
4. The court imposed a longer sentence on you than against members of another race, ethnicity, or national origin convicted of the same conduct; (§ 745(a)(4)(A));
5. The court imposed a longer sentence on you than against someone whose victim was another race, ethnicity, or national origin. (§ 745(a)(4)(B)).

Proof of an RJA violation is by “preponderance of the evidence” meaning you must prove that it is more likely than not that the RJA was violated in your case. You do not have to prove intentional discrimination. (Pen. Code, § 745(c)(2).)

RJA violations in the first two categories above ((§ 745(a)(1)-(2)) may be demonstrated by court transcripts and/or police records. (See *People v. Garcia* (2022) 85 Cal.App.5th 290, 297). A Contra Costa County trial court recently found RJA violations when the prosecutor repeatedly used the n-word and slang terms (including “down-low,” “drug rip,” and “pistol whip”), and introduced rap lyrics and videos into evidence (*People v. Bryant* (October 3, 2022) No. 05-152003-0). In another Contra Costa County case, the prosecutor’s repeated use of the term “baby mama” was grounds for an RJA violation. Though these trial court cases are not citable, they represent the types of claims that that can succeed under the RJA. Juror conduct has been found to violate the RJA, requiring reversal, when a juror used the n-word and made race-based generalizations in deliberations. (See *Stevens v. Beard* (N.D. Cal. 2022) No. 5:13-CV-03877-EJD) 2022 WL 4585836, at *2).

As these cases show, the RJA prohibits implicit racism, like coded language or “dog whistles,” in addition to explicit racism. (Pen. Code, § 745(h)(3)).

Consider too possible examples of RJA violations by reference to new Code of Civil Procedure section 231.7(e) (effective 2022) where the legislature deemed certain topics presumptively discriminatory in jury selection, including: negative experiences with or negative beliefs about law enforcement, not being a native English speaker, having a child outside of marriage, discussion of neighborhood, clothing choices or other aspects of personal appearance, lack of employment, and more.

The third, fourth, and fifth RJA categories require data analysis of similar prosecutions in the conviction county, which can often be obtained by Public Records Act request. You must first demonstrate that there is a race/ethnicity/national origin-based basis for discrimination in your case and then the court can order the government to provide more information about arrest and charging practices, sentencing outcomes, and any information that may demonstrate racial bias. (Pen. Code, § 745(d); see *Young v. Superior Court* (2022) 79 Cal.App.5th 138, 163.) For instance, if police reportedly stopped you for a minor traffic infraction and publicly available data shows that individuals of a certain race are disproportionately stopped for that infraction, you may be able to obtain further discovery under the RJA. (See *Young*, supra, 79 Cal.App.5th at 159).

How to make an RJA Claim?

1. To bring an RJA claim, it is critical to be supported by an attorney. Litigating the legitimate claims is an is an enormous task for the few lawyers designated to handle the RJA. We appreciate that everyone wants their claim handled as soon as possible. However, if we litigate too hastily, judges will find small reasons to deny an underprepared motion, and those small reasons will become the law, barring everyone in the state from relief.
2. For additional information about the RJA and guidance on locating an attorney, contact the Ella Baker Center at 1419 34th Ave, Suite 202, Oakland, CA 94601, and/or Jared T. Rudolph ATTN: RJA, Post conviction Freedom Project, San Francisco Office of the Public Defender, San Francisco, CA. 94103.

Also contact the Office of the State Public Defender at 1111 Broadway, 10th Floor Oakland, California 94697-4139.

Marin County overwhelmed with resentencing cases

By Simeon Alexander
Journalism Guild Writer

Marin County prosecutors are swamped with a flood of murder case petitions based on a change in California law.

The county’s prosecutors are being pressed with fresh crimes, backlogged cases and petitions for resentencing due to law changes in Senate Bill 1437, the *Marin Independent-Journal* reported July 5.

“These (resentencing) cases have taken hundreds of hours of experienced attorney and investigator time and more will be required,” District Attorney Lori Frugoli wrote in an email.

In addition, a Marin County Civil Grand Jury reported in May that the DA’s office is ‘in crisis’ due to internal turmoil, employee lawsuits, staff defections and vacancies.

“A further complicating factor is the increase in the number of murder cases that have been filed in recent years, many resulting from gang activity. These cases require experienced attorneys to manage, and they are time consuming,” the report said.

SB 1437 took effect in 2019, changing the circumstances under which people could be

convicted of murder.

Prior to the bill, defendants didn’t have to personally commit a crime to be convicted of first-degree murder; they just had to be an accomplice.

The new law says accomplices can only be convicted of murder if they were the actual killer, shared the intent to kill with the actual killer, were a major participant and acted with reckless indifference toward human life, or if the murder victim was a police officer, according to the *IJ*.

“These people were convicted under a variety of legal theories, which made them responsible for the actions of others,” said Matthew Siroka, a San Francisco-based lawyer who has been appointed to handle five Marin cases.

When incarcerated persons file SB 1437 petitions, judges first rule on whether their cases qualify for review under the law; if they do, the next step is an evidentiary hearing to determine whether the conviction should be overturned, the *IJ* reported.

The Marin County Public Defender’s office initially attended to the SB 1437 petitions, but due to conflicts of interest with current/former defendants, they had to refer



Stock image

most of the petitions to private attorneys.

“Societal norms have changed radically in favor of leniency in the decades since some of these people were convicted of their crimes,” said Michael Coffino, an attorney representing two petitioners.

Marin prosecutor Dori Ahana stated that the SB 1437 cases are having a huge impact on the District Attorney’s Office and keeping attorneys away from “the other essential business of the office. Each of these cases requires hundreds of hours of clerical, investigative, and attorney time to

review, evaluate and prepare, re-investigate, locate and contact witnesses, and brief/re-brief legal issues — because the law changes from week to week.”

David Sutton, Marin Public Defender, said, “These are old homicides where largely the discovery and old court records are not electronic. They’re in banker’s boxes and transcripts and in some cases on microfiche.”

Matthew Siroka said, “They often require re-investigating the case, expert testimony and reviewing thousands of pages of trial testimony.”

Cash bail leaving LA County, for some

By Jessie Milo
Journalism Guild Writer

Major reductions in the Los Angeles County cash bail system take effect on Oct. 1, the *Los Angeles Times* reports.

The change means LA County will cite and release most defendants accused of misdemeanors and non-violent felonies. In addition, offenders then can be set free with special conditions, which include electronic monitoring and home supervision. These conditions are pending based on a judicial review within 24 hours of arrest, the *Times* reported in the July 18 story.

This change comes after in-

carcerated people filed a lawsuit to stop the use of cash bail, which is operated by the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff’s Departments. The new policy on cash bail comes on the heels of a preliminary injunction on the matter granted by Judge Lawrence Riff, according to the *Times*.

Zero bail was instituted in L.A. County during the pandemic to lower jail populations, as a means of social distancing. Criminal justice advocates argue that a cash bail system favors the wealthy.

“A person’s ability to pay large sums of money should not be a determining factor in deciding whether that person who

is presumed innocent, stays in jail before trial or is released,” Samantha Jessner, L.A. County presiding judge, told the *Times*.

The felonies that will be afforded judicial review to determine eligibility are human trafficking, sex with a minor, and battery on a peace officer. After the changes take effect, some misdemeanors that will require cash bail are domestic battery, stalking and violation of a protective order.

People arrested for a second time after being released on zero cash bail, will not be eligible for cite and release, but can still be set free without bail by a pretrial Judge, according to the *Times*.

A 2022 report showed failure to appear and arrest rates were unchanged by the zero bail policy, the article reported.

“Bail allowed me to continue my life, which included my job, and responsibilities while seeking legal counsel,” said San Quentin resident Roland Cardiel, who has been incarcerated for five years. “It also allowed the court to see me as a productive citizen, and not a prisoner, which made a huge difference in the outcome of my case.”

The desire to get out on bail can be quite high for those housed at the Men’s Central Jail in downtown L.A., where 22 people have died between January and July of this year.

LA County Jail faces new reception regulations

A court settlement brings huge changes to the Los Angeles County Jail intake-processing center, amid horrible conditions.

U.S. District Judge Dean D. Pregerson approved a monumental settlement that will shape the way people housed in Los Angeles County Reception Center are processed and treated, according to the *Vanguard Administrator*.

The agreement between the incarcerated residents, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors and Sheriff Robert Luna specifies many permanent modifications to intake procedures.

“In the IRC, people have had to wait without beds and with access to little food. At times in the past year, the IRC was full of trash and human waste. Hundreds of people waited in the IRC for five to seven days. People with severe mental illness or in states of detox were chained to chairs for up to 100 hours at a time,” said Melissa Camacho, senior staff attorney at the ACLU, which filed the lawsuit.

Rutherford v. Luna has brought forth six new permanent orders to prohibit practices that are not in line with stan-

dards for cleanliness, medical and mental health care.

The IRC is prohibited from holding an incarcerated person in processing for more than 24 hours.

An incarcerated person cannot be bound to any chair, bench or any other object for more than four hours.

An incarcerated person cannot be held in a holding cell for more than 12 hours total nor be confined to a cell with more people that are beyond the cell’s capacity.

An incarcerated person can’t be held in a clinic cage, when locked for more than eight hours

An incarcerated person cannot be held in an area that is not clean and sanitary, and they must have access to functioning toilets, potable drinking water, clean water to wash and sufficient garbage receptacles.

An incarcerated person must have access to adequate medical and mental health care, including and not limited to pill call.

Thanks to the ACLU’s litigation, there will now be alternatives to jailing people with mental health issues. The *Vanguard Administrator* reported that the county will create at

“Hundreds of people waited in the IRC for five to seven days. People with severe mental illness or in states of detox were chained to chairs for up to 100 hours at a time.”

*—Melissa Camacho
senior staff attorney
at the ACLU*

least 1,925 new community beds within the next two years.

Increased mental health staffing was also part of the agreement, to ensure that the proper medication is prescribed during the intake process. This was in response to numerous reports of medication being discontinued for residents during intake, leading to severe psychological distress. The *Vanguard Administrator* reported that a quarter of all jail suicides occur in the first three days after being jailed, and that more than 40% take place in the first week.

“The root cause of all of this is the county’s failure to bring the jail population down. The county supervisors simply have not funded their care first, jails last mandate, and it’s time they begin. They’re committing to do that now, and we will be monitoring closely to see that they do,” said Peter Eliasberg, chief counsel at the ACLU.

In order to keep the IRC accountable, quarterly reports will have to be issued to the court and the ACLU as proof of their progress and compliance. As a way of making sure that these mandates don’t deteriorate, the ACLU will continue to keep a watchful eye over these reforms, according to the *Vanguard Administrator*.

“This is the first time in the country a jurisdiction that we or other advocates have sued agreed that the cornerstone to addressing abysmal jail conditions and overcrowding is to reduce the number of people coming to jail in the first place and to create alternatives to incarceration. A person cannot get well in a jail cell,” said Corene Kendrick, deputy director of the ACLU National Prison Project.

—Simeon Alexander

ILLINOIS

'NOT TO BE:' Original play created to advocate for hope and mercy

By Amir Shabazz
Journalism Guild Writer

Twelve men facing life in prison with no hope for parole have joined a survivor of a violent attack to create a play about their lives and hope for the future.

"We have over 5,000 people in Illinois buried alive," said Melissa Lorraine, referring to persons serving life terms in the state, which has no parole option.

Lorraine survived a violent attack in 2017, which led to post-traumatic stress disorder. She became the artistic director for Theater Y at Statesville Correctional Facility as part of her recovery, the *Austin Week-*

ly News reported July 18, 2023.

Since starting her healing adventure with prisoners, Lorraine became an advocate and an ally for the men she works with, said the article.

Illinois eliminated traditional parole in the late 1970s. The play is aimed at support pending legislation called Earned Reentry Bill, that would help evaluate prisoners who have long sentences for early parole, reported the story.

A playwright was put together by the prison's residents and Lorraine. The play entitled "Not To Be," was written by the 12 men serving life sentences.

The men have concluded their education, engaged in

good conduct while in prison, and they also started a non-profit while in Statesville.

"It doesn't matter how they serve their time; it doesn't matter how many degrees they get, and I work with men who have multiple master's degrees. It's irrelevant and immaterial," said Lorraine.

A portion of the performance men answered questions, and presented a five-minute dance number. Their challenge was to highlight how this performance has changed their lives and made them better human beings.

"Some of them even said, 'How do you expect me to dance 10 years in solitary confinement?'" said Lorraine

The end game of the play is to bring change, healing and growth for each prison resident, as they share their experience, the story said.

With the help of film makers Justin T. Jones and Karl Soderstrom, the company and Lorraine are hoping to gain a broader audience to help them to reinstate the possibility of parole.

"We can conceal the fact that they are incarcerated for a portion of the film until after they fall in love with the men, and then realize that, unfortunately, you'll never have the privilege of knowing this person with our current laws because they will never be released," said Lorraine.

TEXAS

Texas corrections plans to end snail-mail

The Texas state prison system has set its sights on phasing out incoming mail, in efforts to reduce the flow of smuggled goods.

The old mail procedure will be replaced with a digital system, with the hopes of reducing contraband coming into prisons, reported the Texas State Department of Criminal Justice.

Some advocates charge that this change cuts prisoners off from meaningful contact with the outside world, according to the July 13, 2023 story in the *Texas Standard*.

This new law has procedure will hit women prisoners the hardest, especially those who have children or grandchildren, the story said. Pictures of loved ones and kids are no longer available nor do they have right to access treasured mementoes, asserted the story.

completely. Instead, they have to summons the authorities to go look at these pictures on the screen when the guards have the time.

The new mailing process was scheduled to start in July of this year. The new policy does not cover any publications and client attorney communications. It affect mail coming from family and friends, noted the story.

When the facilities switch to the new system, incoming mail will be sent digitally to a mail processing center where it will be sorted, scanned and uploaded onto incarcerated peoples' secure tablets, according to the *Texas Standard*.

Formerly incarcerated women who have been in the system say they know that from their experience, mail does not bring the contraband into prison; it comes from other sources.

Critics say women who were denied pieces of mail with drawings from their kids, would return to the dormitory in tears.

"When I was having a horrible day there I would just run my hand over their signature and just really hold on to that and really meditate on the support that I had on the outside to remind me that there are people out there that love me and want me to be better," said Toon.

—Amir Shabazz

NATIONAL

Solitary confinement lives on despite studies

By Roland C. Cardiel
Journalism Guild Writer

American prisons and jails incarcerate over 120,000 people in solitary confinement, despite repeated calls that the practice amounts to torture, *Huffington Post* reports.

"Solitary confinement is the worst thing that can legally be done to a person in this country, short of the death penalty. It's been proven to be a form of torture," said Jean Casella, director of Solitary Watch.

A report released by the nonprofit Solitary Watch and

Unlock the Box, two organizations campaigning against solitary confinement, said that segregated housing units hold 122,840 or 6% of the U.S.'s prison population. The figure is likely a substantial undercount because it does not include youth or immigration detention centers, and it relies on self-reported data from U.S. jails and prisons, the May 23, 2023 story said.

Experts from the United Nations in 2020 defined solitary confinement as a form of torture if a person remains held alone for more than 15

consecutive days.

"The idea that more than 100,000 Americans — more than 1 in 20 incarcerated people — are subjected to these conditions on a daily basis is shocking, and we hope it will move people to action," said Casella.

People held in solitary confinement are likely to develop a variety of problems, such as PTSD and other long-term mental health issues, says Prison Policy. Upon release, incarcerated persons held in solitary confinement seem more likely to overdose or to commit sui-

cide, the story stated.

On the federal level, President Joe Biden has promised to work to eliminate or reduce solitary confinement. The Federal Bureau of Prisons reported it would take the necessary short- and long-term steps to address this issue and released a statement expressing confidence in the ability of BOP Director Colette Peters to meet the goals of the President Biden's order to "ensure that conditions of confinement are safe and humane" and "free from prolonged segregation."

1. Arizona — (*The Marshall Project*) Unhoused residents strive to survive the deadly temperatures as much of the U.S. faces heat at extreme levels. Phoenix in particular had a 31-day streak of highs above 110 degrees. In addition to the survival of heat there are the interactions with police, who have the task of engaging with and clearing encampments of those unhoused individuals. Though most interactions with police lead to arrest, *Martin v. Boise* is a 2018 federal appeals court decision that said the government could not criminalize people for sleeping outdoors when adequate shelters were not available. The U.S. Department of Justice investigated the Phoenix Police Department regarding illegally throwing away the belongings of unhoused people during encampment clearing. Adding to unhoused people's stress is the fact that police often do not give advance notice, which forces people away from sidewalks, parks, and other public spaces.

2. Minnesota — (*Prison Journalism Project*) Classes offered at a correctional facility in Stillwater, Minn., give residents a chance to change their thinking around conflicts with officers. People who assault correctional officers at the prison are sent to solitary confinement for 60-360 days, according to Donovan Diego, who is incarcerated at the facility. Residents and staff have the opportunity to participate in classes that could have a huge impact on the successful release of prisoners. One graduate noted that having officers who "come in and put their badge down, sit down and talk about life as men — not as prisoners and officers, not as criminals and cops — but as men, we would walk out of this room with a different perspective of each other." However, since 2020, the Minnesota Department

NEWS BRIEFS

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

of Corrections reports that assaults against staff are increasing.

3. Michigan — (*The Michigan Daily*) A new survey will launch in April 2024 polling local government officials, law enforcement officers and county prosecutors across the state to evaluate their position on criminal justice reforms in order to determine how to meet the needs of the community. Senior program manager Debra Horner, of the Michigan Public Policy Survey, said, "We will be asking (about) the challenges and needs that local governments have, police community relations, criminal justice and prosecutorial reforms like cash bail and alternative sentencing." Anushka Jalisatgi and Jade Gray, co-presidents of

the U-M chapter of College Democrats, advocated for having common sense police accountability. "We cannot continue to talk about criminal justice reform without mentioning mass incarceration. It is crucial to fund community intervention programs and mental health initiatives to help stop the cycle," wrote Jalisatgi and Gray.

4. New York — (*The Guardian*) New York is planning to build the tallest correctional facility in the world. In the downtown Chinatown area, this new jail will stand around 300 feet tall. Residents of Chinatown are not sold on the idea. Local landlord Jan Lee of Neighbors United Below Canal Street anticipates a "massive building, extending

two to three blocks in every direction, that rises as tall as the Statue of Liberty ... This is going to be the beacon of Chinatown," he says. Adding, "No matter where you look downtown, you will see this jail." Dana Kaplan is the senior adviser for New York's independent commission for criminal justice reform. "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to try and transform the city's criminal justice system into something that is more humane," she says.

5. Connecticut — (*Fox 61 News*) Law enforcement and lawmakers are calling for reform and changes in laws after six people were arrested following a two-day crime spree. State Rep. Michael Quinn (D-Meriden) said that the current laws for juveniles

and repeat offenders aren't working. "The problem is, we're treating too many repeat offenders the same way as we're treating first-time offenders," said Quinn. According to associate professor Mike Lawlor at the University of New Haven, part of the problem is that resources are not being utilized among the police and prosecutors. "As it turns out, compared to pretty much any other state, Connecticut does a much better job of preventing crime among juveniles," said Lawlor.

6. Massachusetts — (*Associated Press*) Forty-five organizations showed up to support formerly incarcerated individuals and families at a community resource fair put on by New Beginnings Re-Entry Services, a

nonprofit that also has a residential program in Roxbury. The founder, Stacey Borden, is also formerly incarcerated. She started the resource fair to assist those released from prison in navigating their new lives. "Formerly incarcerated people need to visually see the resources in their community," said Borden. The resource fair offered services to individuals with substance use disorders and information on advocacy organizations that focus on criminal justice reform. Angelia Jefferson was able to record a performance of her 8-year-old granddaughter, something she could only dream about a few years ago. "Words can't even express how I feel right now," Jefferson said. "I'm trying to stop crying."



MISSISSIPPI

Economic benefits of justice reform brought to light

By Daniel Chairez
Journalism Guild Writer

A report says Mississippi can increase economic growth by improving criminal justice reform.

FWD.us is an organization that seeks criminal justice reform with the hopes that they can reduce the amount of people in prison to help improve their economy, according to *the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*.

“Mississippi’s business and elected leaders know how vital growing our economy and developing our workforce is to communities across the state, and this new report makes clear that pursuing commonsense criminal justice reforms will do both,” said Alesha Judkins FWD.us state director.

The gap between the workforce and the populated workforce in Miss. has become noticeable and is straining its economy; Miss. is coined as having the lowest labor force in the nation, just barely above half of their population at 54% is actually pursuing employment or is employed.

Part of the blame is put on the process and methods with which people are removed from the workforce, and the discrimination-taking place in interviews towards those who are formerly incarcerated. It has been reported when one becomes entrenched within the criminal justice system; motivation to pursue a legitimate lifestyle diminishes, related the report.

Also reported is the duration of the sentence in regards to the seriousness of the crime, which seems to hinder the productivity within the workforce.

“Long sentences contribute to the lack of qualified workers, by removing from the labor force and creating barriers to reentering it when they return home,” stated the report.

It is believed that 29% of the Miss. population has a criminal history, 11% of that 29% have been convicted of a felony and of those percentages, and 5% have prison priors. Having this history on you, record hinders the possibilities of getting a job by 50%. The effect this has on Mississippi’s workforce is staggering.

Although there are social

and criminal justice movements going on throughout the nation, efforts to improve employment opportunities in Miss. have been met with bias and prejudice, asserted Corrections 1.

“Many licensing boards deny people with criminal conviction records the opportunity to receive a professional license, and they are allowed to do so under the law, no matter how long ago the conviction occurred or how relevant the offense was to the line of work,” stated the report.

The significance between what formerly incarcerated person earns and what someone who has never be incarcerated earns, translates into a percentile with the difference of 52%. Because of this massive default, Mississippi’s economy suffers a 2.7 billion dollar loss every year. Further elaborating on the effects of criminal injustice on Mississippi’s economy translating into revenue that did not take place, which surmounted to 95 million dollars, which did not circulate within the economy. Meanwhile taxpayers are still paying 400 million dollars to keep prisons functioning.

Since this report has been circulating, Miss. has taken steps in the right direction to correct criminal injustices. One small step was when the suspending of licensing for unpaid violations was ceased, thus reopening those windows of opportunities reinstating the traveling accessibility, noted the findings.

Other measures became available when Senate Bill 2795, a bipartisan passed in the senate, gave new eligibility to incarcerated people who had served more than 50% or 65% of their sentences, and this increased the opportunity of paroling after serving half of your entire sentence.

Prior to this advancement in criminal justice reform only about 33% were eligible to have their sentences reduced, because Senate Bill 2795 passed that percentage doubled to 66%, according to the news report.

Overall, the report found that besides the impact criminal injustices has had on their economy, criminal injustices must be peered into more deeply a rest ratified with proper, sound, and safe practices for the community.

NEW YORK

Data: National murder rates drop by more than 10%

Murder rates were at an all-time high three years ago, but declined in the first half of 2023, new data shows.

The data compiled by the FBI shows that the murder rate is 10% higher than in 2019 in major cities. Nevertheless, it also shows that the percentage has fallen 12% this year as reported by the *New York Times*.

COVID and George Floyd murder were believed at least two of the contributing factors in the murder rise. However, the hiring of more police officers and new anti-violence strategies has created a shift that this year may produce the largest drop in murder in more than 60 years the June 26, 2023 story says.

Workplaces, schools, police, and addiction treatment

are just some of the services that help keep murder rates down. During the COVID pandemic, these services came to a halt.

Other countries did not have the increase in murders that the U.S. did, leaving some experts skeptical that COVID was a reason.

Another possible reason for the decreases in murders is that the tensions caused by George Floyd’s murder have begun to subside.

Many cities post-COVID have funded more anti-violence programs and grown their police force.

Crime analyst Jeff Asherm told the *Times*, “I do think it’s a little premature to be making any strong conclusions about what all this means just yet.”

—Roland C. Cardiel

NEW JERSEY

Youth offenders gain Starbucks training in New Jersey Corrections

By Roland C. Cardiel
Journalism Guild Writer

In New Jersey, youth offenders go from serving time to serving mud as they learn how to make a mean cup of coffee while acquiring job skills.

The Starbucks coffee franchise has collaborated with New Jersey Department of Corrections in a barista training program for youth offenders, according to *nj.com*. The program launched on May 1.

Five incarcerated persons from the Garden State Youth Correctional Facility qualified for the training program. In Trenton, Starbucks store manager Kiana Justiniano showed the young trainees the art of coffee making. The nine-week training sessions include customer service and instruction on making various specialty drinks, such as signature coffees, teas, and cold brews.

“The New Jersey Department of Corrections is at the forefront of providing reintegration services to individuals both during and following incarceration to help them succeed in the community,” said Commissioner Victoria Kuhn, according to the article.

In a report by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics from 2021, formerly incarcerated persons had an average of



Courtesy Chris Carden // NJDOC

The incarcerated youth learn to make Starbucks-worthy beverages while gaining work skills.

3.4 jobs in the four years after leaving prison. One-third of them could not find a job at all while some held several jobs simultaneously, cited *nj.com*.

NJDOC officials said that they created the Starbucks program to “provide meaningful reentry” and to help formerly incarcerated persons with jobs that pay prevailing wages.

“We are committed to providing incarcerated persons with real-world skills and training to help them become

productive and fulfilled members of the community,” said Kuhn.

The training took place at the café at the Mates Inn, a restaurant that provides culinary arts instruction for incarcerated persons on the grounds of the Department of Corrections Central Office in Trenton. Their training provided them with transferable skills such as writing a resumé and practice for job interviews.

Officials want to offer this

training to other prisons on the area and to expand the class sizes to 30 or 40 trainees annually. Applicants must have a release date within 36 months to qualify for the program, according to the story.

Darcella Sessomes, chief of the NJDOC Division of Programs and Reintegration Services, said, “The barista training program is an excellent opportunity for each participant to learn a new marketable skill in the coffee house industry.”

MASSACHUSETTS

State addresses its overuse of LWOP sentences as replacement for outlawed death penalty

By Randy Hansen
Journalism Guild Writer

Massachusetts state lawmakers are considering ending life sentences without possibility of parole, and allowing parole applications after serving 25 years, the *Boston Globe* reports..

“When we outlawed the death penalty in Massachusetts, life in prison without any possibility of a parole review should not have taken its place,” coauthor Sen. Liz Miranda said during a hearing in July.

“No one here advocates the release of serial killers and other worst-of-the-worst offenders, but ... we cannot throw away our young people, and I believe that young people can change,” Miranda added. “I do not believe justice is a system that has over-policed and over-sentenced thousands of young Black boys, men and women from communities of

color.”

With 14% of the prison population in Massachusetts serving life sentences without parole and half of those incarcerated people are over 55 years old, it seems the state law that requires all incarcerated people charged with first-degree murder must have “without parole” in the sentence that rehabilitation must be an added option, the July 28, 2023 *Globe* said.

Massachusetts also has the highest rate of women serving life in the country. “Life without parole is a hidden death sentence,” said Patricia Olsen, 59, testifying virtually from a women’s state prison in Framingham who has served almost 20 years,

She added that of the 25 women serving first-degree murder sentences, 10 are over 55 years old and half a dozen of those have major health problems. Rehabilitation and reduction on taxpayer dollars

“No one here advocates the release of serial killers and other worst-of-the-worst offenders, but ... we cannot throw away our young people, and I believe that young people can change.”
—Sen. Liz Miranda

for medical bills has been estimated at \$2.4 million for 55 women serving life without parole in her prison.

An incarcerated man in a Norfolk prison, Raymond Colon, explained that investments into education and rehabilitation should give hope to some and said, “People change, and that change should be measured against public safety through a parole

hearing.”

Ronald Leftwich was sentenced 26 years ago for a murder. He said, “Society was right to incapacitate me ... [so I would] never again disrupt my community nearly beyond repair. But 26 1/2 years later, I am not that man anymore. I am now asking the legislature for the opportunity to give back to my community and repair the harm I caused.”

Many of the people who showed up at the legislative hearing in person and virtually also addressed other issues such as elimination of mandatory minimum sentences on certain cases and a proposal to ban construction of new jails and prisons for five years.

Sen. Miranda addressed concerns that families and victims of violent crime have and mentioned her own little brother was murdered outside a night club in Boston in 2017, but she did not ask the judge for life without parole.

OREGON

New bill set to fix flaw in legal representation

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

The Oregon State Legislature passed a bill overhauling the state’s system for legal representation of indigent defendants, according to the *Sixth Amendment Center*.

On July 13, 2023, Gov. Tina Kotek signed into law Senate Bill 337, devoted to correcting deficiencies in the framework of the state’s current system for providing the constitutional right to counsel for indigent defendants.

A 2019 study by the center reported that Oregon failed to uphold its obligation under the United States Constitution’s Sixth and 14th Amendments.

Previously, Oregon had no officially appointed public

defenders; instead, it relied on a system of contracting private sector counsel who were paid a flat fee for services. The flat fee payments left lawyers with a conflict between financial self-interest and the rights of their indigent clients, said the July 14, 2023 story.

The study found that lawyers regularly failed to communicate with their clients and frequently were not qualified for handling specific cases.

To remedy the problems the SAC recommended that Oregon abolish the flat fee payments to contracted private counsel, and replace it with hourly pay or with the hiring of government employed public defenders.

The commission was left in

place and charged with fixing its own inadequacies, such as having too few lawyers for the number of clients, which causes many poor defendants to be denied counsel.

In the end, Oregon adopted many of the SAC’s reforms. The bill consolidates Oregon Public Defense Commission oversight functions, with certified expanded power to set and enforce standards. The executive branch commission will consist of nine members with all three branches of government having equal appointing authority.

The statute abolishes flat fee contracting and creates a compound system of government-employed public defenders and contracted private counsel.

The private counsel will

receive an hourly fee, set by the OPDC, with rates tied to the state employee hourly increase. For long-term cost control, the statute requires that 30% of the state’s trial level indigent defense caseload be handled by government-employed public defenders by 2035, according to the SAC.

The Oregon Legislature appropriated \$90 million to the OPDC for the first two years and set dates for it to report on its progress in developing and implementing the plan, reported by the story.

Though Oregon has taken some steps to remedy this issue, SB 337 does not fully comply with national standards, nor did it adopt all of the center’s recommendations.

YOUTH



Scott Budnick, a Hollywood film producer, and TikTok star Victor "Vicblends" Fontanez spent two days at San Quentin with aspiring youth filmmakers.

Skyler Brown // TV Specialist

Two celebrities visit SQ to collaborate with youth offender filmmakers

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

Two celebrities visited San Quentin on August 9 and 10 to collaborate with incarcerated filmmakers and inspire participants of the Youth Offender Program.

Scott Budnick, founder of The Anti-Recidivism Coalition, a film producer known for the “Hangover” films and “Old School,” came in with Victor “Vicblends” Fontanez, an A-list barber who cuts celebrities’ hair. Fontanez is a celebrity in his own right on TikTok, known for cutting random peoples’ hair on the street for free or giving homeless people a makeover.

“He was very charismatic. I can definitely see why he has such a huge following out there — very inspirational, a great motivational speaker,” said resident Ryan Pagan, an aspiring filmmaker with SQ

Media Center’s *ForwardThis*. *ForwardThis* produces approved videos for their official Instagram and YouTube accounts that humanize incarcerated people, featuring their rehabilitative successes and struggles. Pagan said they had the privilege of having a Zoom meeting with Fontanez so he could mentor them on short-form video social media. It was then that Fontanez proposed the idea of coming in, which Butnick and SQ’s public information officer, Lt. G. Berry, helped arrange.

On Aug 9, Budnick and Fontanez met with over 20 of SQ’s YOP participants in the prison’s chapel, offering words of encouragement and inspiration.

It was instructional but also good for the community to see Scott and Fontanez, who is big on TikTok.

“People have an idea of who Scott is because of ARC, but I

think it’s important to get to know the guys who are fighting for you. He was interacting not just with us, but with everyone on the yard, anyone who had questions. Guys came up and thanked him for helping them out by getting laws passed and getting more support for youth offenders,” Pagan said in reference to the juvenile and youth offender reform and resentencing laws that ARC helped to pass.

Besides coming in to talk with the youth offenders and help prepare the staff at *ForwardThis* for jobs in the film industry, the pair also came back in the next day to collaborate on content.

ForwardThis filmed Fontanez giving resident Anthony Gomez, also with *ForwardThis*, a haircut on the Lower Yard. After, Fontanez posed for pictures with correctional staff. Fontanez exercised with residents on the

Lower Yard next and then toured the prison with Budnick.

In West Block, the pair took pictures with correctional officers, some of whom knew “Vicblends” from TikTok. Besides cutting Pagan’s hair in the unit’s barber chair with some of the residential barbers taking notes, Fontanez went up to the fifth tier and helped make a burrito “spread” and shared lunch with some of the grateful residents.

Fontanez told the guys he was exhausted after the workout on the yard and the long days in prison.

“We learned a lot, it motivates us,” said SQ resident Jeremy Strain of *ForwardThis*. “It takes our minds outside of prison to be treated like regular people...[they took] time out their day when they don’t have to, to come in and see us, you can tell it’s genuine. It means a lot to us.”

South Carolina-Model Study: Peer-mentor model brings success to reentry

By Harry C. Goodall Jr.
Journalism Guild Writer

Community Opportunity Restoration Enhancement (C.O.R.E), a mentorship program at Tuberville Correctional Institute in South Carolina, is assisting young men who are preparing to leave prison by pairing them with older men serving lengthier sentences.

C.O.R.E exists as a housing unit that prioritizes open communication and reflection in hopes of reducing violence behind bars, according to the Associated Press.

“These guys need to be able to let loose and express themselves and their emotions,” said Matt, a mentor who’s also a barber. “It gives them the opportunity to be who they really are, instead of this tough guy mentality that you have to put on where you’re in prison.”

According to study by the Vera Institute of Justice (VIJ), this type of initiative has been in place at two state prison detention centers in the U.S. and has proven successful.

The walls inside these units are covered with colorful murals and natural light. The residents work on developing a trusting relationship alongside Correctional Officers, reported the news.

“People are still getting in trouble people are people. Young adults are young adults. However, violence is down,” said Selma Djokovic, the associate director of research at VIJ.

“The conditions of our prisons help produce violence,” said Madalyn Wasilczuk, a University of South Carolina law professor. “It’s not a surprise to me that treating people more humanely and better would reduce violence.”

Typical residence at this institution wears different clothing as the program par-

ticipants wear blue polo shirts and khakis. Their cells are painted with collegiate teams. In addition, lower level discipline offenses like possession of contraband and disorderly conduct might be met with writing an apology letter, or a public apology, said the article.

“You are showing everyone around the country what’s possible in this prison, and in jails and other facilities around the country,” said Amy Solomon U.S. Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General.

Participants have access to utilities such as washing machines, a mini fridge that they can chill water or food. In addition, a shared kitchen is credited with giving dignity and curbing theft, noted the story.

“I asked God to forgive me for what I did,” Khalil said. “However, that has nothing to do with the impact on another human being and the lives I have hurt. I teach the youth that we’re obligated to do something.”

When correlating data the VIJ studies show an estimated 73 % decrease in the odds of violent convictions. However, the overall misconduct charges were comparable between the treatment group and the control group.

“As opposed to standing around and watching, they’ll be a part of correcting,” said South Carolina Department of Corrections Bryan Stirling. “The goal is for them to make sure people reenter society safely.”

The prison is a medium security prison located in central South Carolina. The focus on the youth is 18 to 25 year olds. These special units have notably higher rates of recidivism and consistently professional growth and less stress, according to the Associated Press.

AIDA founder shares his experience with domestic violence and finding rehabilitation

Raul Higgins
Contributing Writer

A Domestic Violence program helped a Youth Offender transform his life from one of violence to a life of service at San Quentin State Prison.

The Awareness Into Domestic Abuse program at SQ was co-founded by Floyd and Vanessa Collins. This program was first started at the California Training Facility in Soledad, California in 2014. AIDA’s mission is to eradicate domestic violence from the inside out.

In 2019, AIDA went from just an in-prison program to becoming a non-profit organization. The program offers a 12-module Domestic Violence correspondence course, and a separate course on “Understanding the Cycle of Violence.”

“While incarcerated, I became a man with character and integrity, and developed a strong set of values,” says Floyd D. Collins, a Youth Offender.

Floyd was 23 years old at the time he committed his life crime. He murdered his then-girlfriend Demetria

Yates. By the time he was sent to serve his sentence in an adult institution, Floyd was 26 years old.

As a child, he witnessed domestic violence take place in his home and within the neighborhood he grew up in. Seeing and treating women as inferior was normalized, and Floyd adopted this as part of his belief system.

For many years, he blamed his parents as being the reason why he ended in prison. Floyd started to do the work on his denial and other underlying causative factors in 2013. It then became clear to him that he grew up with feelings of insecurity, jealousy, and worthlessness.

Upon realizing the devastating impact of his negative attitude and choices, Floyd took action by taking responsibility for the harmful consequences of his past behaviors. He knew there were no other options, but commitment to change.

In addition, Floyd became an incarcerated lead facilitator for AIDA in SQ. His long and humble journey of transformation continues to move forward with a peace-

ful attitude. He admitted there have been times when these changes have were uncomfortable, but deemed it necessary.

Floyd helped lead the way in awareness by laying the groundwork into changing his own path of domestic violence. He has acknowledged the trauma and ripple effects of domestic violence he had on his indirect victim-survivors: daughter Delacey Collins, sisters Sashell and Renita Yates, and immediate family: Linda Henry (mother).

He has attributed this growth to several strong self-help groups that have molded his transformation into fruition.

“There are many groups that helped shape my growth and transformation. However, here at San Quentin, I would say, “GRIP Guiding Rage Into Power and Kid CAT’s Juvenile Lifers Support Group.” At CTF Soledad, I attributed “Success Stories and BRAG’s Therapeutic Community.” These groups set my path of purpose and transformation in motion,” says Collins.

As a domestic violence facilitator, Floyd has accredited who he is today to AIDA’s own curriculum. “This is a direct correlation of my character today. AIDA’s curriculum is a mechanism I feel that helps a person do the necessary ‘ME SEARCH’ needed to transform distorted beliefs of who I am today and is a reflection and attribution of AIDA’s mission,” he said.

Collins recalls so many takeaways, but his most valued ones are remembering when he was sent to prison because of his callous life crime.

“I saw when people are treated as human beings, they will respond in a humane fashion. When I arrived at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, it was the first institution where I have ever felt humanized. As a result, I have created many lifelong bonds, family, and friends who can count on me,” said Floyd.

Moving forward with his spirit of equanimity, Collins’ vision is to leave a memorable legacy.

When asked what he thought his legacy would be, he stated, “Transitioning into

this next phase of my journey, I would like to leave a legacy of being of service to my community.”

“I want AIDA to become a ‘staple’ program at the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center. When someone thinks of me, I want them to remember I always made time to assist others in any way I could,” he said.

Collins leaves a message for youth offender lifers and non-lifers that have and may still be struggling with domestic violence themselves.

“You have a lot of time to reflect on what brought you here. You can make the choices to invest in change, develop insight, and make a living amends. I would also emphasize their life is not over. However, the choices you make today will be the foundation of ever being free of incarceration.”

Collins’ last heartfelt words of wisdom are much deeper than just a message. His words are from a heart of remorse and empathy, especially those who are still suffering today from any type of domestic violence.



Floyd offers these words of wisdom to any man or woman in an abusive relationship, “GET OUT!” Although it may be difficult for many reasons, find a safe way to get out. An abuser can change if they truly want to stop and seek help. However, while they are in their addiction of being abusive, the accessibility of their objectification only serves to give them more power, control, and abuse. Please DO NOT underestimate abuse, it can turn deadly.”

This past June, after having served over 27 years for his life crime, Floyd D. Collins was found suitable for parole. His awareness of the magnitude of his offense helped him become suitable for reentry back into society. Floyd “walks the talk” as he facilitates AIDA Domestic Violence groups inside of the San Quentin.

Kid CAT (Creating Awareness Together) is a group of men who committed their crimes in their teens and were sentenced as adults to life terms. The group’s mission is to inspire humanity through education, mentorship, and restorative practices. Kid CAT Speaks wants to hear from all the juvenile lifers, educators, and policymakers concerning juvenile justice issues and rehabilitation. Contact us at San Quentin News, Attn: Kid CAT Speaks, 1 Main Street, San Quentin, CA 94964

HEALTH

Mysterious illness named Sick Building Syndrome is being blamed for common illnesses that cannot be diagnosed

By Vincent E. O’Bannon
Staff Writer

Have you ever experienced an indescribable ailment, signed up for sick call, and by the time you were seen by a doctor, the ailment was gone? You may have suffered from “Sick Building Syndrome.”

Sick Building Syndrome (SBS) is a term used to describe health-related illnesses where no specific illness can be identified.

Many people diagnose themselves with a cold or flu after experiencing symptoms, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“On several occasions I have signed up to see my doctor for an ailment that seems urgent, but when I get there, I feel better. But as soon as I get back to my cell, the sickness returns,” said SQ resident Derrick Pearson. “It’s irritating when you feel there’s something wrong but can’t explain what it was to the doctor.”

SBS can affect your skin, respiratory, and neurological systems. Indicators can include a headache; eye, nose, or throat irritation; dry cough; dry or itchy skin; dizziness and nausea; difficulty in concentrating; fatigue; and sensitivity to odors, noted the EPA.

There are a number of potential causes and contributing factors of SBS. Inadequate ventilation in buildings, which occurs when heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems do not effectively distribute air to people in the building, can be a cause. According to the EPA, water accumulation in ducts, drain

pans, ceilings, and insulation breeds contaminants. Biological contaminants, such as bacteria, molds, pollen, viruses, or even bird droppings, may contribute to SBS as well.

Other contributors of SBS could include the following:

- High levels of dust
- Tobacco smoke
- Rooms with poor lighting
- Outdated computer displays that cause eye strain
- The presence of mold or fungus
- Formaldehyde (mostly found in wood furniture and floors)
- Asbestos
- Chemicals in the air from cleaning products
- Pesticides
- Carbon monoxide
- Ozone from the use of printers and fax machines
- High levels of stress at school or work
- Low workplace morale
- Heat or low humidity

The key to diagnosing SBS is that symptoms improve after leaving a building, and the same symptoms return when returning to that same location. The EPA notes that there are four basic factors that influence indoor air quality: the occupants; the HVAC system; possible pollutant pathways; and proper ventilation. Solutions for SBS include the removal of the sources of the pollutants, increasing ventilation rates, cleaning of the air, and education and communication among building occupants.

What are the symptoms of Sick Building Syndrome?

SBS symptoms can affect your skin, respiratory, and neurological systems.

Among the possible symptoms are:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Throat irritation | Breathing difficulties |
| Tightness in the chest | Runny nose |
| Allergy-like symptoms, such as sneezing | Burning sensations in nose |
| Dry, itchy skin rashes | Headaches |
| Dizziness | Chills |
| Forgetfulness | Fatigue |
| Irritability | Nausea |
| Body aches | Fever |

Self-care activities maintain mental wellness

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

A prison term can feel like a traumatic experience. The environment has strict rules and regulations, and a lack of personal control can severely affect mental health, according to the Forensic Behavior Analysis Blog post “Self Care Within The Prison System,” by Danielle Rousseau.

Incarcerated persons can maintain their mental stability through self-care and healthy communication, the blog says. Incarcerated persons housed in state prisons often have long sentences and need to endure lengthy self-care management.

“In regards to exhausting emotional anxieties: Bible study, meditation, music, and journaling helps me maintain mental stability,” said San Quentin resident Steven Warren.

Self-care is important in stabilizing mood and reducing anxiety, including developing good relationships with others, related the article.

“I help others by facilitating self-help, such as a veterans group that deals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. By helping others it helps me,” said San Quentin resident Donald Edge.

San Quentin Education gar-

dener Pablo Sanchez said, “I really love the flowers and planting connects me with nature. It helps my mental stability, which allows me to help other people.”

The blog post says that healthy management of body and mind is critical in maintaining sanity within the confines of prison’s perimeters. In addition, physical care such as running, brisk walking, and playing tennis greatly improves mental health.

“Basketball has helped me deal with emotions such as anger, it helps me pull away from it,” said Mason Ryan, a San Quentin Warriors point guard.

According to the post, weightlifting “builds the body up and promotes the release of the feel-good hormone testosterone.” It can also decrease the indications of stress and prevent depression.

“In dealing with stress on the inside, I work out and talk to people in recovery who want to be a positive force,” said incarcerated person Daniel Kramer.

According to an article by Heather Stringer, published by the American Psychological Association, psychologists believe that interaction between correctional staff and the prison residents can encourage mental stability.

Stringer’s article says that

psychologist Dave Stephens has trained wardens, mental health professionals, and caseworkers on how to communicate with incarcerated persons. Stephens’ work focuses on how to communicate with incarcerated persons in ways that minimize the chances of re-traumatizing incarcerated persons who have a history of trauma.

“This can reduce anxiety and the risk of re-traumatizing people who are expecting violation and abusive behavior,” said Stephens. He recommends that facilities provide new arrivals with information of steps to take if they experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other types of mental illness.

Stephens says he encounters opposition from correctional staff who believe it is not their job to “make things easy for inmates,” he says. “But with some explanation and discussion, staff become more open and positive, especially because these strategies create a safer environment for both inmates and employees.”

Danielle Rousseau says that every incarcerated person should find a way to maintain mental stability, but methods have little importance “as long as they are being kind and gentle to themselves.”

Long term effects of Covid still an issue

By Dante D. Jones
Staff Writer

Covid-19 in the United States is starting to become just another seasonal virus, however, the long term effects of the disease is still a problem for many, according to the Associated Press.

After a study was conducted on approximately 10,000 Americans who reportedly suffered from an omicron infection, 10% of them admitted to experiencing COVID long haul.

The above study, published by the National Institutes of Health, suggests that long haul symptoms of this virus can range from fatigue and brain fog to dizziness, chronic cough and chest pains among several others.

And although long COVID has touched million around the planet, scientist the world-over are still perplexed as to why these symptoms occur, or why it effects some

and not others. Or, how to treat and/or diagnose it.

“Sometimes I hear people say, ‘Oh everybody’s a little tired,’” said Dr. Leora Horwitz of NYU Langone Health, one of the study authors. “No, there’s something different about people who have long COVID and that’s important to know.”

The *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which published a report in late May, concluded that 1 in 3 patients experienced long Covid after being infected.

This research is similar to the 2021 NIH study in which some participants said they were infected with Covid long before omicron started to ravish the U.S. in late 2021, reports AP.

In the most recent study, the *Journal* focused on multiple different symptoms in an attempt to define long COVID, which includes heart palpitations; sexual

problems; loss of taste and smell; thirst, etc.

Assigning scores to these symptoms, scientist attached to this study sought to establish a mechanism that could allow possible long COVID patients to be placed in future studies that can be compared with other COVID long haul studies elsewhere.

However, Horwitz disagrees with this approach. She thinks that doctor’s shouldn’t diagnose their patients using this list. Her position is that it should be only be used as a tool for research. She reasons that patients may exhibit one, some or none of the symptoms on the Journal’s list and still experience long COVID after infection of coronavirus.

So many scientists are conducting studies on COVID long haul symptoms yet “we don’t even know what that means,” Horwitz said.

Hopefully one day we will.

What everyone needs to know about Hepatitis C

Transitions Clinic Network (TCN) is a network of community health clinics that serve returning community members. TCN clinics are led by Community Health Workers (CHWs) with lived experience of incarceration who support people with their healthcare and reentry. TCN hosts a monthly Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) column. This column is a space where we answer questions about health care and empower individuals to prepare for healthy reentry. This month we are writing about Hepatitis C.

What is Hepatitis C?

Your liver is a large organ in your body that filters your blood and help your body remove wastes. The word “hepatitis” is a medical word that means liver inflammation (irritation/swelling). Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) that can cause problems with the liver.

The Hepatitis C Virus is spread through contact with the blood of a person who is infected. Some common ways people get Hepatitis C is through sharing needles or syringes for injections, having unprotected sexual contact, getting piercings or tattoos with unsterile equipment, or sharing care items like toothbrushes, razor

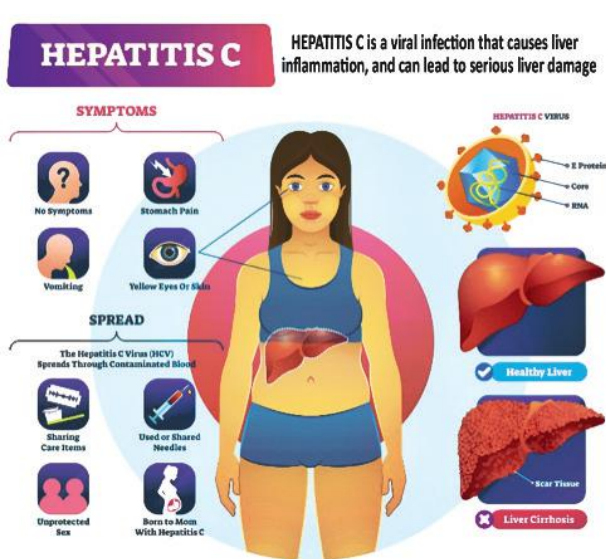


blades, or nail clippers that could have blood on them. It can also be passed from mother to baby in pregnancy. Hepatitis C does NOT get spread from activities that don’t involve blood like hugging, kissing, holding hands, sharing food, coughing, or sneezing.

Many people with Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms in the early stages. Some people even get rid of the virus in the early stages before they even know they have it. But most people develop chronic Hepatitis C (which means they carry the virus for a long time). Over time the virus can damage the liver and that might start causing symptoms like tiredness, stomach pain, nausea, loss of appetite, dark urine, jaundice (yellow skin/eyes), or skin rashes. Damage to the liver is called *cirrhosis*.

How is Hep-C diagnosed?

Hepatitis C can be hard to detect if one does not have symptoms; it often gets diagnosed in late stages after causing damage to the liver. Blood tests are used to check for the virus, even if you don’t feel



sick. Blood tests will look for signs of the virus in your blood or signs your body is fighting it off. It is recommended that all adults get tested for Hepatitis C at least once in their life and that some people get tested more often if they are at higher risk (like if you use injectable drugs or have been tattooed while incarcerated).

Can Hepatitis C be treated?

Yes, if you have Hepatitis C there are safe and effective treatments available! To de-

cide which treatment is best, your doctors may order more tests to know which kind of virus you have and how healthy your liver is. Most treatments are one or more medications you take for 2-3 months. After finishing the treatment, blood tests are repeated 3-6 months later to check for the virus. Being cured means the Hepatitis C virus is no longer in your body so it cannot damage your liver. Getting rid of the virus may allow some of the liver damage to heal over time. If

you take the medication as instructed, the newest treatments have a 90 percent chance of curing Hepatitis C if it’s your first time being treated.

If you are taking medications to treat Hepatitis C, it is really important to take them as instructed for as long as instructed. You shouldn’t skip doses, miss days, or stop taking the pills early. If you are not able to take the medications correctly, it can cause them not to work as well at fighting the virus and might actually cause the virus to become resistant to treatment.

What can I do while in prison?

Ask to be tested for Hepatitis C if you have not been tested or if you want to be retested.

Prevent Hep C by using new (not sharing) needles, syringes, and personal care items. Use protection (condoms) anytime you have sex. Avoid getting piercings or tattoos in prison or only use sterile equipment for piercings or tattoos.

If you have Hepatitis C, talk with your doctor about treatment options.

What should I know for when I leave prison?

In the community you can request testing or treatment

for Hepatitis C from your primary care provide (PCP). Make sure to apply for health insurance (Medi-Cal) before you leave prison so you can connect to a PCP in the community. There are many community clinics that take Medi-Cal and offer Hepatitis C tests and medications. If you are getting treated for Hepatitis C while incarcerated, you should continue your treatment in the community. You will get at least a 30-day supply of medications when you leave and it is very important to find a doctor for a refill before you run out of medications. Give us a call at the Transitions Clinic Network if you need help finding a doctor in your community of return!

If you have healthcare-related questions about reentry, feel free to write us at:

Transitions Clinic Network
2403 Keith Street
San Francisco, CA 94124

Or call our Reentry Health Hotline today at (510) 606-6400 to speak with a CHW and to see if there’s a TCN program in your community of return. We accept collect calls from CDCR. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.



Medical executives from various departments braved the dunk tank and allowed residents a chance to make a splash in support of mental wellness. Residents lined up and took turns throwing softballs in attempts to hit the small, yellow target. Those who succeeded were rewarded with not only cheers from fellow residents and present staff, but also a bag of chips. The staff involved had great fun and even partook in some attempts of their own to dunk coworkers. Not one person who went into the dunk tank came out dry afterwards; but everyone walked away from the special event with a smile.



MENTAL WELLNESS WEEK

"People think mental health is for the weak, but it's actually takes a strong person to take care of their mental health."
—Dr. Chen, head psychologist



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon, Aristeo Sampablo, John Liu // SQNews

MENTAL WELLNESS TAKES CENTER STAGE

Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

On Friday September 15, a stage with speakers and microphones was set up in front of the medical building on the Lower Yard to celebrate the last day of San Quentin's Mental Wellness Week. It was a cool, gray overcast morning, yet the crowd was thick and excitement was in the air.

Medical executives from all areas came together to talk about the importance of taking care of one's mental health, including

Head Psychologist Dr. Rachel Chen, whose worked at SQ for 15 years.

"People think mental health is for the weak, but it's actually takes a strong person to take care of their mental health," said Dr. Chen. "It's important to break down the stigma."

The goal is to teach residents that taking care of one's mental health is an important component of self-care. "We hope that by coming out here we can start to normalize mental health so it is no different than going to the

dentist," Dr. Chen said.

Psychologist Dr. Nocerino performed a rap song he wrote called, "Inside My Soul." He wore a black hat with the word "anxiety" written in white and a black with a sweat shirt with the word "anxious" across the front.

Dr. Nocerino, who goes by the stage name Dr. No, rapped about intergenerational trauma, becoming emotionally overwhelmed in the process as he spoke from the heart. "Never said I was broken, can't find my way to sleep," he rapped.

Residents also took the stage to perform, sing, and recite spoken word to encourage mental health awareness.

Members of San Quentin's Asain Pacific Islander community performed a modern day Haka dance dressed in red and black cultural attire wearing fierce faces and gesturing. While traditionally associated with warriors preparing for battle, the Haka dance they performed for Mental Wellness Week symbolized the end of war, suitable for a day of peace.



Paying tribute to lives lost

Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

During this event Mourning Our Loses was also present to commemorate the losses of every incarcerated person. MOL was founded to highlight and pay tribute, to the many lives lost during the COVID-19 outbreak.

MOL is a Texas-based nonprofit created to track and highlight the moral cost of mass incarceration nationwide, and to honor all those who have died while living or working behind bars.

As a part of mental health wellness, the community came together in the multiple activities taking place and a long way, outsiders and SQ residents, joined together bringing awareness to mental health and wellness, breaking down the barriers created by the stigma of asking for help or being seen as weak for needing assistance.

Dr. Kirsten Pickering, volunteer for MOL, participated doing one push up. Shyly, with a smile on her face, she commented that she didn't have much upper body strength, but that she did it

for the veterans and for all the incarcerated. Her act of kindness motivated many others and free staff to share in the pushup challenge.

"Mourning Our Losses, San Quentin is here because acknowledging grief is an important part of mental health. We are also planning the next memorial for residents and staff who passed away at San Quentin in the past year." Dr. Pickering concluded. "We want the population to know that we welcome everyone who would like to perform, or just say a few words, at the event."

Staff from all over the prison took part in the event, whether in a classroom or out on the Lower Yard. Medical staff were all smiles as they passed out the prizes during the raffle. Others came in to sit at a table and inform residents about the various mental wellness services available at San Quentin. While some programs required active participation (like the veterans' table offering wristbands for 22 pushups) others opened the doors of classrooms to share information. On the first day of Mental Wellness Week, the Veteran's group held a ceremony for victims of 9/11.



A bell heard across the yard

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

On the morning of September 11 on the Lower Yard, over a hundred residents attended a ceremony paying respects to the lives lost on 9/11/2001 as part of San Quentin's Mental Wellness Week.

For more than four hours, dozens of incarcerated military veterans read the names of the 2,977 lives lost in New York City on that tragic day. A bell was rung in reverence for each name.

"It was an honor and duty to serve," said resident Damou Evans, a Navy veteran. "As a service member, you are in a position where you are protecting our values, the land, and the people of the United States."

Evans expressed how important mental health is to him as a veteran, and in particular how it should be addressed at an earlier age.

Many veterans struggle with mental health, as evidenced by the 22 suicides every day on average among veterans in the America, according to *CombatWounded.org*. Nearly a quarter of all suicide deaths in the United States are veterans.

Despite being proud to serve their country, many veterans feel that society does not understand them. Many face difficulties upon transitioning to civilian life, which contributes to their incarceration rates. Mental health conditions like anxiety disorder, manic-depressive disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common.

At San Quentin at least, veterans are able to find understanding and support through groups and contributions such as the 9/11 memorial event.

"The community events for veterans inside is touching," said Tina Rutsch, an outside volunteer has worked with many of the veterans groups in SQ.

Chalk'n It Up

By Richard Fernandez
Staff Writer

As part of the final day of Mental Wellness Week, residents had an opportunity to express their artistic side by creating chalk art on the pavement of the Lower Yard.

Participants were asked to draw pieces of art using one letter from the phrase, "YOU BELONG," which was already written with colorful chalk in eight-foot tall block letters.

In one drawing by Jesse Milo,

his popular cartoon character "Milo" was holding three different colored balloons with a caption that read, "live your life for the release date you want."

Another drawing displayed a couple of \$100 bills. "This represents that only two \$100 bills for gate money is an issue. Many of us have nobody when we get out, and money will be an issue," said the artist [Brad] Odell, who encouraged resident to "address mental health now" using the resources available so you can "be ready when you get out."

Cory Baldwin created an abstract drawing of different colored designs. "Mental health issues are real," he said. "It's generational if we don't get our issues addressed." Baldwin added that he would like to see more availability of mental health clinicians as a "20 minute time frame is not enough."

By the end of the day, colorful drawings decorated the pavement, reflecting different interpretations of each letter showing the importance of mental health.



MENTAL WELLNESS



Alongside San Quentin mental health psychologists, the Board of Prison Hearings Executive Director Jennifer Shaffer talks to the community about mental health considerations for board preparation.

Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

Jennifer Shaffer speaks on the influence of mental wellness on board risk-assessment

By Dante D. Jones
Staff Writer

In front of a packed crowd in San Quentin's Garden Chapel, Jennifer Shaffer, the executive director the Board of Prison Hearings, spoke to the incarcerated as part of Mental Wellness Week.

Shaffer began, as she did last year, by going over issues pertaining to what the

Board is looking for in determining whether an incarcerated person poses a current, unreasonable risk to the public. She explained the Board's use of a "structured, decision-making framework," which was created by the National Parole Board of Canada and is now used in nearly a dozen states across America.

She said that the evi-

dence-based, risk assessment tool helps guide the analysis of a person's potential risk for recidivism.

This year, Shaffer's talk focused on how working on one's mental health is an essential part of being found suitable for parole by the Board.

"I love talking about mental health issues," Shaffer said. "I come here because

I like to talk about mental health and its connection to suitability of parole."

Shaffer stated that the Board's position with respect to mental health treatment is that it helps to determine what kind of citizen a person will be if released to the community.

Along with mental health, Shaffer used her time at this year's symposium to talk

about the disease that is substance abuse.

"The number one reason that people violate parole after being granted parole by the Board is substance use disorder," she said.

Shaffer believes that substance abuse is intricately tied to mental health treatment or lack thereof. She reasons that a person who is using drugs should seek help

with their addiction before they go before the Board.

"If you're still using and you think you're going to get a grant [of suitability it is] highly unlikely," she said.

"Have tomorrow be the first day that you start your recovery."

"Wise words, though they are easier said than done," one resident was heard saying.

REDEMPTION

COMPASSION PROJECT DISCUSSES NEED OF TRANSFORMATION IN REHABILITATION

By SQNews Staff

SQNews talks with Compassion Prison Project founder Fritz Horstman about her Trauma-to-Transformation Workshops within California's state prisons. The workshops deal with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

SQN: Why is it important to bring Compassion Prison Project events into these different prisons?

FH: First off, when I read, "The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk, I learned that I had experienced extensive childhood trauma. I didn't know my negative, reactive behavior was because of the trauma I experienced in childhood. Trauma awareness was my first step in healing and changing my life. I went from hyper-vigilant and anxious, to calmer, happier and able to meet stressful situations less reactively and negatively. Coincidentally, a month after I read "The Body Keeps the Score"; I walked into Kern Valley State Prison and heard stories about trauma and reactivity and shame. I wanted to share the relief and freedom I felt.

SQN: What do the Trauma-to-Transformation Workshops entail?

FH: Our programs bring to light the devastating effects of childhood trauma (and other trauma) on the brain, body and spirit. Trauma changes the way we see the world and changes the way we interact with the world. From the stories I've heard and the information and stats I've gathered, prisons have some of the most



Courtesy Fritz Horstman

Participants of the program practice meditation are relaxing their minds and taking deep breaths.

traumatized men and women living in facilities without adequate mental health care or basic understanding of trauma. Our events and curriculum create trauma awareness which is the first step to transforming our problematic behavior patterns and help us remember the divine humans that we all are. This understanding has the potential to create a paradigm shift moving from violence and reactivity to compassion and responsiveness.

SQN: What do you take away from the experience of doing these events?

FH: Every time I get to visit a prison facilitating our Trauma-to-Transformation Workshop, my life changes. How could it not? I am face-

to-face with up to 120 people who share their stories of abuse, neglect and resilience, who courageously look at their past, find forgiveness and create the possibility of a new life. Being witness to these transformations is medicine for my soul and energy for my spirit. I always leave prison exhausted and renewed.

SQN: What have you experienced participants take away from the Adverse Childhood Experiences circles?

FH: One of the most rewarding parts of this work is seeing participants connect the dots between how they were treated as children and how they are treating their own children. When participants understand that a "whopping" or criticizing/ threatening/hu-

miliating a child can change the development of a child's brain, participants commit to ending this violence in their own homes and communities. We have the chance to change the lives of our families at home. We can end child abuse and neglect. We can bring this information to our communities and shift the child abuse/neglect paradigm ... in effect, creating a new world.

SQN: How is the writing campaign going? What is the goal of the essays?

FH: We have over 200 entries for our Messages to the Youth campaign, where contributors get to give advice to the youth on the streets. This is a chance for the men and women in our prison system to give back and make a dif-

ference. We will be publishing submissions online and the best submissions will be included in an anthology we hope to deliver to the youth in homes, [juvenile] halls, rec centers and wherever we can deliver the messages.

SQN: Why was it important to add Military Trauma to the curriculum?

FH: We spent two days at the Correctional Training Facility working with the incarcerated veterans and a few staff veterans in April 2023. Becoming aware of trauma in any form: Military Trauma, Childhood Trauma, Prison Trauma, small "t" trauma, Societal Trauma is the first step in healing.

Working with the men at CTF at the Veteran's Hub, we

explored the trifecta of trauma: childhood, military and prison trauma. The PTSD that those men have experienced are mirrored in the lives of every man and woman I've met, living and working in prison.

We have the chance to transform prisons into Centers of Transformation. It begins first with awareness, next with an Agreement of Safety where EVERYONE agrees to nonviolent behavior

SQN: Any inspirational words for our readers dealing with their childhood traumas?

FH: What happened to you was not okay. Awareness is the first step to healing. Become a trauma detective and find out what happened to your developing brain and how it has contributed to your current situation. Forgive yourself and forgive those who hurt you. It will change the field, it will change the world. And spread the word about this work to your communities.

SQN: Any future plans or goals for CPP?

FH: We are expanding our Trauma Talks curriculum across the US and globally. Right now we have the program running in or about to run in: Mississippi, Connecticut, Utah, UK: Scotland and Northern Ireland, including Germany and four more places. [Also] We are developing a curriculum and workshop for Correctional Officers and staff.

SQN: Any final words?

FH: As we all become trauma-aware and trauma-informed, we have the chance to transform our behavior, and in doing so, help transform the world. Let's get busy!

RE-IMAGINE

SQ residents receive much-needed shelter on the yard from new gazebos

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

There are new additions to the scenery of San Quentin's Lower Yard. Several covered wooden benches can be seen spread out along select areas for residents to enjoy tabletop games and dodge natural elements like the recent heat wave.

The gazebo-like tables were made by residents working in the building vocation program at San Quentin.

Resident Jonmark Spencer is a gamer and self-described nerd who loves sharing outdoor time with his fellow gamers.

"It gives me the option to be out here when it rains or when it's hot because I'm on heat meds," Spencer said.

"I like it while we have it, but they're not going to last because they are not varnished, leaving them exposed to the elements and nature," he said.

Spencer noted that he sees the results from all the uproar and conversations about changing San Quentin into a rehabilitative center as a part of the governor's California model plan. Seeing things changing around the facility, convinces him that it is more than just talk.

"I do believe that it is a step in the right direction," concluded Spencer.

The untreated wooden fixtures are



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

set strategically around the yard.

Derek Reliford, a resident housed in H-Unit, believes the money would have been better spent on education and mental health services. Even so, he said he enjoyed sitting on a shaded

bench.

"I think it's different in a positive way, but that's what SQ does. SQ is the cream of the crop. This is where I found myself. I have made this a part of my life," Reliford commented. He

also talked about his plan to come back when he is released to help people still incarcerated. "I can't see myself doing anything else," he said.

Many people were seen just sitting and watching all the activities

"I think it's different in a positive way, but that's what SQ does. SQ is the cream of the crop. This is where I found myself. I have made this a part of my life."

—Derek Reliford

on the yard, while several Hispanic men placed a blanket over one table, setting up for a game of dominoes. Jorge Ramos said that the space is good for those who choose to be out on the yard all day. "There are a lot of people here. I think they need about 10 more [tables]," Ramos said.

Pablo Sanchez agreed that the administration is taking steps to allow the incarcerated population a chance to see the positive changes that have been talked about over the past few months.

Sanchez said that he will meet with others from school and do homework and socialize along with the tabletop game playing.

He said the administration "is thinking about the good things for us. We feel more comfortable because we see the change. Everyone needs to take care of it because it is for us."

MENTAL WELLNESS

Transformative Mediation event opens doors for all

By David Ditto
Associate Editor

The founder of SQ's new Transformative Mediation program, Rochelle Edwards, greeted residents stopping by their table on the last day of Mental Wellness Week.

She is one of the professional mediators who teach the program's trainees the conflict resolution skills they will need in order to become facilitators of transformative mediation themselves.

"We've been training the first group for a year and we're already hearing stories about how better listening has helped many of them in their own lives and helped the people around them," said Edwards, who has been facilitating rehabilitative groups inside The Q for 23 years.

"They have learned professional skills to facilitate dialog between residents, family members, and the people in the communities they return to," she said.

One of those trainees, Adán Arriaga, invited passers-by to attend a listening circle held in a nearby classroom. He said that active listening is a valuable tool in conflict resolution. He explained that listening attentively and being able to reflect back what was



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

Participants sit together in listening circles to experience the importance of active listening.

heard are essential skills for effective communication.

"We've used these skills to peacefully solve conflicts a few times, including once in the chapel," said Arriaga. "We are very pleased when the guys trust us to be a part of the solution."

Residents who participated in a listening circle got a taste of improving communication skills themselves.

Two trainee "circle keepers" facilitated each circle. Brian, one of the keepers,

used a pink highlighter as a "talking piece," explaining that the one holding it is the only one who should speak.

"What does joy mean to you?" Brian asked the person on his right. Brian handed the highlighter over to him for a reply, and then received it back to confirm the reply, asking, "Have you been heard?" When the participant felt he had in fact been heard, it was his turn to ask the person on his right, and so on around the circle.

"Listening sounds basic, but real listening is hard work," said Judy Bornstein, another professional mediator who volunteers with the program. "Being present in the moment takes practice and listening during conflict is particularly challenging."

The first cohort of Transformative Mediation facilitators graduated the following week and they will begin offering their conflict resolution and teambuilding services to community.

Seeming Fine

Lifers discuss challenges accessing mental health support

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Residents of San Quentin participated in an open forum dialog with mental health practitioners during Mental Wellness Week to discuss resources and programs, including for those with indeterminate sentences that must have a psychological evaluation prepared for the Board of Parole Hearings.

"It's complicated in regards to mental health in prisons. You can get a second opinion."

—Dr. Paul Burton

Dr. Paul Burton and Dr. Al Bunn of San Quentin hosted the forum in the Education Annex. They took questions and listened to comments from the audience. Many residents shared their personal experiences of medical programs and staff — both good and bad.

Some people related that they had difficulty accessing mental health professionals after being removed from CCCMS, which is a mental health status that allows more resources under a program. Some said they were turned away because they "seemed fine" to a medical professional and were subsequently taken off CCCMS. Others talked about being

given information from a health professional that they felt was contradictory to what they were feeling inside.

Some individuals wanted to understand the process of psych evaluations and how they influence their parole board hearings.

"It's complicated in regards to mental health in prisons. You can get a second opinion," said Dr. Burton.

He discussed the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with mental health clinicians, and he encouraged residents to continue with mental health programs.

"I think this is a great time, at least at San Quentin, because there are going to be more opportunities to get assistance, not because you need it, but because you want it," Burton said.

'Namaste:' Prison Yoga Project demonstrates chair yoga

By Willy Alarcón
Staff Writer

The Prison Yoga Project brought mindful meditation and basic yoga movements to San Quentin's Mental Wellness Week through 10-minute "chair yoga" sessions.

Veronica, a yoga instructor for 12 years, spent a few minutes talking about the positive benefits of yoga on mental health. She described how their program can help the incarcerated quiet their minds and heal their bodies, finding peace in the process.

"Yoga is about being gentle to your body and easing pressure," Veronica said, "especially in an environment

like this; you find peace for your mind and body."

The "chair yoga" practice is great and effective way to wake up or get moving when feeling lethargic: 1) Place your feet on the floor and your hands on your lap. 2) Round your upper back and open your shoulders while lifting your gaze to the sky. 3) Breath deeply to open the airways and then twist your torso. 4) Move your shoulders up and back, releasing tension from your back and shoulders. 5) Massage your neck to relieve any headache pressure.

Veronica closed the session with a simple hand to the heart and belly pose and then recognized everyone with the traditional greeting of "namaste."



During Mental Wellness Week, long-time yoga instructor Veronica taught residents chair yoga exercises.

Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

MENTAL WELLNESS



A beacon of light in the darkness

Jesse Milo
Journalism Guild Writer

On last day of Mental Wellness Week, residents lined up to learn about a life-saving tool in their community known as the Light Keepers.

The Light Keepers are residents of San Quentin who are trained by mental health staff as peer mentors to support other community members going through a mental health crisis.

“Mental Health Week is very important because there are people here going through crisis and this event lets them know there are people out there to help keep them from going into those dark places,” said resident and Light Keepers member Jamie Acosta. “That’s why Light Keepers are here...with you can talk to another person in blue.”

The Light Keepers motto is: “We are a beacon of light in the darkness.”

The Light Keepers is not just for suicide prevention, they also help if you are dealing with the loss of a loved one or are having trouble adjusting to prison life.

Derrick Lute-Rosario, an SQ resident of 8 months said, “There’s a lot of people here who struggle, especially when they lose a loved one. So I think it is great to have people who can help you through that.”

Light Keeper Mark Cadiz said, “We are trying to fill that space between staff and the homies.”

One Light Keeper shared his experience with despair and hopelessness. “I had the knife to my throat, and it was a friend, a retired police officer, who talked me out of it,” said Gordon Kimbrough. He still bears the scar from his attempted suicide on his neck. “Just as my friend was there to help me, the Light Keepers are here to help you!” Kimbrough added.

Expressive Arts fills the room with an evening of talents and unity



Photos by Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews



"We have infinite power, if we just tap into it."
— Henok Rufael

From top left, clockwise: Raul Aguayo open the show with a solo performance. Henok Rafael hosts the evening's event and kept the audience laughing between sets of music inspired by mental health awareness. George "Mesro" Coles-El and deaf artist Saeliaw "West Bird" Kaomang, rocking the stage together in a rap that put everyone's hands in the air.

By Aristeo Sampablo
Journalism Guild writer

On September 13, San Quentin's residents gathered in the Garden Chapel for an “expressive arts night” as part of Mental Wellness Week.

Residents enjoyed live performances by their peers, who showcased a myriad of talent. Along with the music, residents were treated to snacks in a rare treat. Approximately 20 talented and brave people took the stage to sing songs, rap, play music, or share poems, jokes, or words of encouragement.

Raul Aguayo opened the night with a solo performance playing guitar and singing.

“This is a masquerade and I showed up without my mask,” he sang in his refrain. “You may think that it’s all wrong, but I’m alright.”

Henok Rafael hosted the event and encouraged everyone to look inside themselves and bring out their power. “We have infinite power, if we just tap into it,” he said.

Several members of San Quentin’s hearing-impaired community performed — rap and comedy — and talked about suicide prevention, bringing awareness about life and temptations.

One of the most popular performances of the night was by deaf rapper “Westbird,” who

was assisted by George “Mesro” Cole-El who vocalized the lyrics that Westbird signed. The crowd went wild with applause and cheered him in American Sign Language that they were taught by Tommy Wickerd, who teaches an ASL class at San Quentin and served as the interpreter.

The event featured something for everyone, including the Spanish community given there were several performances in Spanish.

“It’s a privilege to be able to be part of this Mental Health Wellness week. This brings awareness and prevention of suicide,” said resident Sergio Linares.

TECH

Technical skills invaluable in a technical world

Residents weigh-in on why they want to gain technical knowledge while incarcerated

By Sherman K. Newman
Contributing Writer

For many incarcerated persons, learning about information technology has been an elusive endeavor: they either never had any exposure to it or they had no interest in it. In today’s world, knowledge of IT remains indispensable.

In these interviews, Last Mile participants share their experience with tech, what having technical skills means to them, what the learning experience looks like, and what they plan to do with their new skills once they reenter society.

Mr. Tran, what inspired you to enter in the Code 7370 coding program?

“I was in California Men’s Colony in 2018; I heard about the program and decided to ask for a transfer to San Quentin to apply for The Last Mile program. Before coming to prison, I was a network engineer; I also have some programming experience with Microsoft Visual Basic programming language.”

Talk about your experience in the program.

“There is no better vocational training for the incarcerated to achieve employment opportunities when released. This program is built on empowerment and personal growth, helping students develop coding skills as well as soft skills, communication, and teamwork. I temporarily forget I’m in prison. The atmosphere is cordial, friendly, and professional. I’m grateful and privileged to be a teacher’s assistant in the Code 7370 program. I hope to reenter society and continue coding and enhancing my skills.”

Mr. D. C. Craft, what made you decide to want to learn how to code?

“We often don’t think prison is a place of learning. However, I wanted to challenge myself, to expand my mind and skills to make myself a more well-rounded individual. I’ve learned

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that no matter how difficult it may seem to accomplish a goal, if you put your mind to it, anything is possible.”

Mr. Rojano, tell us about your experience in coding and what made you want to become a coder.

“I always wanted to learn how to make video games. My favorite first-person game is Halo; it inspired me to make those types of games.”

What has been your learning experience so far?

“So far, I’ve learned that making video games is a lot harder than I thought, and it has given me more appreciation for those who write these games.”

What are plans for the future in gaming when you return to society?

“I plan to continue my education in computer science, possibly university or a [coding] boot camp, such as Hack Reactor or General Assembly.”

What has the TLM experience been like for you?

“It taught me soft skills; the ability to have inter-personal relationships with people I otherwise may not have communicated with, learning new ways to collaborate with people from different walks of life.”

Mr. Hale (Ibrahim Abdul Azim), what made you want to learn how to code?

“I was introduced to coding by my basketball coach, who himself was a student of Code 7370. He talked to me about the program and let me know you don’t need prior experience to enter the program. I applied and was accepted.”

What has the experience of learning how to code been like?

“It’s been a beautiful struggle; I failed multiple times every day. The benefit of failing is learning how to problem solve and trouble shoot,

which translates into solving real world problems.”

Mr. Levin, what has your coding experience felt like?

“I’ve been part of The Last Mile/PIA Code 7370 program since 2016. I began as a student in what was then called Track 1, currently called Web Development Fundamentals, and then moved into Track 2, currently called MERN. In 2018, I was accepted into the Joint Venture Program where I was given the opportunity to develop websites for outside clients. That was an amazing experience for me because I was able to put the skills I had learned in Tracks 1 and 2 to real, practical use. I also experienced what it was like to work collaboratively with other coders on large projects, which was extremely valuable. Unfortunately, the pandemic forced the Joint Venture program to come to an end. But when the coding program resumed, I was accepted as a TA for the WDF and MERN tracks.

“I am a computer geek at heart and have loved working with computers since I got my very first computer, a TRS-80 Model I, way back in 1979. I received my Bachelor’s of Science degree in Computer Science in 1986 and worked in the IT industry on everything from large mainframes to personal computers up until my commitment offense in 2009. I feel extremely fortunate to be a member of the Code 7370 family and get a great deal of satisfaction sharing my coding knowledge and computer experience with those in the program who may not have had the opportunities growing up that I did. For me, being a TA in this program is part of my living-amends and allows me to give back in a small way to my incarcerated community.”

These few examples show incarcerated persons who have taken the initiative have been able to enhance their skills in preparation for their release. Anyone with an interest in learning coding should submit an application to Code 7370/PIA.

AI found to be biased in criminal risk-assessment

By John Liu
Journalism Guild Writer

Artificial Intelligence is gaining popularity in criminal justice systems, but it lacks oversight to protect against misuses, *The Conversation* reports.

Researchers criticized the lack of access to AI data and information because that “raises serious questions of accountability and transparency,” according to *The Conversation*, a research paper published July 26, 2023 in *Conversation Insight*, a British social science journal.

AI was supposed to replace human assessors that eliminated bias to better predict risks of recidivism. However, AI tools posed significant challenges to the system they serve in Britain. That is because of a lack of understanding amongst prisoners, judges, and probation officers on how these tools work.

The paper describes AI tools as difficult to handle, and their results confusing to use. For example, British probation officers complained the tools are painstakingly long to complete, according to the research. This resulted in nearly one in every five Black and other minority ethnic prisoners without complete assessments.

Meanwhile judges often see baffling scores varying amongst different AI tools that complicate their sentencing decisions. In effect, the criminal justice system uses and depends on these tools to be accurate without understanding their vulnerability to bias.

AI tools are not immune to bias. Bias can affect AI models in many ways to produce unfair results, the story warned. The paper points to three different ways that biases can manifest in AI tools.

The first type of bias is by design: developers can impose personal values and moral bias in creating these tools.

The second type of bias is in data creation: probation officers can introduce personal or cultural bias when evaluating responses to questions such as remorse and criminal thinking.

The last type of bias is systemic bias: certain racial minorities have been overrepresented in data due to decades of prejudicial police practices. This has tipped the AI against these minorities; meanwhile, AI are less accurate on women, transgendered people, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities because a lack of available data.

Both the UK government and experts worry that, without proper monitoring, AI tools can produce racist results because they had been provided with racially biased data.

The paper raises moral concerns on using AI tools on individuals, because these tools are meant to find “correlations” between groups of individuals and certain risk factors of reoffending. Thus, AI uses historic data to calculate risk that are not representative of any individual person. Instead, AI treats an individual by placing him or her into a group; i.e.: this individual belongs to “this” group of people that reoffended at “this” rate in the past.

Therefore, if a risk score is incorrectly high, the person is in effect being punished because other person in his group has reoffended more than he will. If a risk score is incorrectly low, the person is in effect being treated favorably because people in his group reoffended less. The latter mistake also places public safety at risk.

Ultimately, the paper cautions that an incorrect AI risk score can have dire, real-life consequences to a human being. Ensuring the accuracy of AI risk assessment tools by allowing public monitoring is imperative to justice and public safety, the report suggests.

EDUCATION

Thirty years later... Lifers recall when Pell Grants fueled college dreams



By Charlotte West

As Pell Grant eligibility returns for people in prison on July 1, we wanted to know what the moment was like when higher education went away almost 30 years ago. We asked four lifers to share their experiences with Pell Grants before 1994, when Congress eliminated access to federal financial aid for incarcerated students, in their own words. Their stories have been edited for length and clarity. This story was co-published with *Slate*.

‘I need to find my way out of here’

I arrived at Muncy in 1985 and college classes were already a mainstay. I took my GED then enrolled at Bloomsburg College. We had two classes a semester and Pell paid it all. A couple years later Bill Clinton ended Pell Grants for prisoners. A lot of people were pissed.

I could no longer afford to go. I had to drop out of college. I hated to do that, because I was emotionally abused as a child and my father was illiterate. He always told me I’d never amount to anything with my life. The fact that I had a life sentence made me feel he was right, until I discovered college.

College changed everything. It make me feel like an adult for the first time. And I discovered my identity and intelligence. When it went away, I was dejected and sad I couldn’t accomplish graduating. I would have been the first in my family.

I focused all my attention on my apprenticeship — a multitrade program through the Pennsylvania Department of Labor. My certification is as a maintenance builder, repairer, and servicer. It took 6 years to graduate. We had to build custom furniture for staff to fund the program.

After I graduated, I went on to specialize in carpentry at the maintenance department for 15 years. I also went to school for computers, and then took a course in AutoCad to use with carpentry. And then took Accounting 1, 2, and 3. I planned a future in carpentry to open my own business. I just need to find my way out of here to do it.

--Charmaine Pfender, Pennsylvania has served 35 years in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. She is one of three original founders of the nonprofit Let’s Get Free: The women and Trans Prisoner Defense Committee.

‘There were good people who cared more about my future than I did’

Methamphetamine derailed my 1987 high school graduation. I was then locked in a

small jail cell facing murder charges three weeks later. Soon thereafter, I was sentenced to life within the Oregon State Correctional Institution.

I was relieved to find that prison was much more like a college than the violent war zone I feared thanks to the education opportunities offered by Pell Grants. The prison offered two and four-year college degrees, vocational training and apprenticeships in numerous professions. Approximately 20 percent of the 1,000 prisoners at the prison were taking classes. New prisoners were constantly encouraged to join them, but I could not see a future for myself after being told I would die in a cage.

Thankfully, there were good people here who cared much more about my future and me than I did. I thought I was done with school after a woman in the education department helped me quickly earn my high school diploma. But she immediately encouraged me to enroll in college.

Truthfully, I was afraid of enrolling because I still believed the lie that I had internalized for so many years: that I was not smart enough to ever have academic success. Fortunately, she refused to take “No!” for an answer, and finally convinced me to give it a try. I eventually earned a two-year degree on March 17, 1995.

Earning a degree helped free me from a psychological prison that I had constructed for myself as a child. It made me finally believe that I could achieve and become so much more than I ever imagined possible. It is a sad irony that I discovered this freedom only in a cage, but prison education was an essential key to my personal freedom.

Finally, understanding the value of education, I wanted to continue. But my educational journey came to a screeching halt. Congress abolished prison Pell Grants just six months before I graduated and I could not pursue a four-year degree because both colleges quickly left in 1995.

Sadly, my fellow prisoners and I witnessed guards gleefully celebrating as college classes ended.

Mark Wilson, 54, has been an Oregon prisoner since 1987. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Oregon in 2019. Since 2019, he has served as a member if a legislative working group seeking to improve prison education opportunities.

‘It was like a badge of honor’

In 1982, I started my incarceration in the Maryland State Penitentiary, where 90 percent of us were serving life sentences. The other 10 percent were serving virtual

life sentences (50 years and above). College programs such as Coppin State College (now Coppin University, an HBCU) was one of the few tools available for an incarcerated person to improve himself and to stay positively focused away from destructive behavior. A few incarcerated people were also earning master’s degrees.

I can vividly recall the disappointed faces after the college coordinator, Ms. Yolanda Hendricks, informed incarcerated people that the undergraduate program was going to cease operations. Being part of that program was like a badge of honor. It also encouraged students to earn their GED so they could go to college.

It really felt like I was in a comfort zone when I earned my GED and then went to college. I was so proud of myself when I walked across that stage in 1989 and received my degree.

The most devastating effect of the Pell Grant removal was an increase in hopelessness. With hopelessness comes an array of destructive and self-destructive behavior.

Ninety percent of all programs in the penitentiary were created by incarcerated people that had earned a degree or were in pursuit of a degree. When the Pell Grant ceased, many of those programs eventually stopped functioning. The programs that remained were taken over by prison officials and were only a fragment of what they once were.

Craig Muhammad, Maryland, has used education to reach back and help his incarcerated peers to become better human beings. He is writing tutor for the University of Baltimore Second Chance College Program, a trained peer support specialist and a facilitator for the Georgetown University Law Center Legal Writing Program.

‘Gladiator School’

As the old-school California Youth Authority van pulled into the infamous Youth Training School, I thought my life was over. It was, at the time, California’s largest youth prison, known as “gladiator school.”

It was 1991, I’d spent the previous two years fighting and losing a juvenile court fitness hearing for a shooting I committed as a 16-year old. I got transferred to adult court, refused a deal, lost a first-degree murder trial, and wound up sentenced to 25 years to life in prison. I was a classic case of what they today would call a “youth offender.” Back then, we were “super predators.”

There was one redeemable thing about gladiator school—I discovered that the facility actually had a Pell-funded bachelor’s pro-

gram in sociology from the University of La Verne. For a kid who acquired his GED in juvenile hall at the age of 16, being able to perhaps parlay my woes into a college degree was the only inspiring thing in my life.

I eagerly enrolled and quickly knocked down 39 units. But then, in fall 1992, a race riot handed me time in solitary confinement, a DA referral, and a gnarly transfer to an even more volatile youth facility. Over the next 15 years, during which time Congress killed our access to Pell Grants, I spent most of my time in and out of administrative segregation.

It wasn’t until I was doing my last long term stint in the hole that I started to contemplate a different mode of life on the inside. While in lockup, I’d received a reply letter from Thomas Aquinas College in Ojai, California responding to my request for donated paperback philosophy books. One of the professors there visited me regularly, became my friend and caused me to contemplate universals, questions my ethics, and deconstruct my malformed ideas about my purpose on the planet.

I own my mistakes. I went on the ride of being a follower trying to survive the idiotic politics I was too afraid to buck. My beef is with the obstacles placed in the way of the academic climb I’ve tried to make since then, after I changed my life, flipped my script, and started to explore my capacity to exist beyond the limiting confines of what I’d been indoctrinated to accept for myself.

I’ve been on never-ending college program waitlists for nearly 10 years while staying disciplinary free, dropping my custody points, and earning my way from maximum-security prisons to the medium security facility I’ve been at since 2018. After every transfer, I had to start the climb again, from the bottom rung of a ladder that placed me last due to my life sentenced.

It took me 30 years to get back on track.

Ghostwrite Mike, California, is a student at Coastline College, transferring to Merced College in the fall. He’s a published poet, illustrator, and journalist. His work has appeared in Exchange, a Literary magazine by incarcerated people published by Columbia University School of the Arts. He’s the Co-founder of the Barz Behind Bars (B3) poetry workshop at Valley State Prison in California, and managing editor of the Barz Online literary blog for the Ben Free Project, producer and co-host of the Lifer Cypher podcast at University of New Haven’s WNHU, and carceral strategies consultant to the board of the non-profit Radical Reversal.

From junkie to student

A journey of addiction ends with college and giving back to community

By Anthony Manuel Caravalho Staff Writer

Vanessa Rojas’ journey from sexual abuse survivor to 30-year junkie, gang member, and federal prisoner left one ray of hope to turn her life around. That hope was education.

Rojas discovered Rising Scholars network, a group of community colleges dedicated to opening opportunities and academic achievement for students who have experienced the criminal justice system.

“I decided in prison to enroll in higher education, but there were so many barriers at that institution that prevented me from doing so,” said Rojas.

Today, Rojas is a student at both Palomar College and MiraCosta College majoring in sociology and lives in Vista.

“I believe everything happens for a reason... prison [got] my life in order...[it] changed the trajectory of my life to a new and better direction,” said Rojas.

In the federal penitentiary, she dreamed of establishing programs for formerly incarcerated higher-education students, even though she didn’t realize these types of programs already existed.

She wrote in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, “I would daydream about college, and I did everything I could to educate myself. I had a hunger for learning and knowledge like never before, but my education plans had to wait until my release.”

She also reminisced about how her addiction almost destroyed her and her family.

It was a life that she was not proud of. “I did not wake up one day and say, ‘I think I will be a meth addict, and why not just add heroin to my addiction as well?’” said the reformed college student.

“I could not see a future beyond my next shot of heroin,” added Rojas.

She also spoke of her experience within the penal system.

“I left behind a broken family, which included three adult children and my elderly mother, who was the primary caretaker of my special needs daughter...my two oldest adult children put their lives on hold for a very long time because they couldn’t leave my mother alone with my youngest,” said Rojas.

“To make matters worse, I was sent to serve my sentence across the country at the correctional facility in Tallahassee, Florida,” said Rojas.

Rojas’ release on May 9, 2021, included residency at a

halfway house in San Diego.

She received a compassionate release from the halfway house and served the remainder of her sentence on an ankle monitor. In addition, she was subject to random mandatory drug testing at the most inconvenient times.

Rojas agreed to get a job within 30 days of her release, according to the terms of the halfway house, but the mandatory drug testing all but eliminated her from getting hired.

Unemployment became her chance of a lifetime once her federal probation officer approved her enrollment in the Transitions Scholars Program at MiraCosta College.

She is now in her second year while majoring in sociology and has maintained a 4.0 grade point average. Her academic performance enabled her to receive numerous scholarships; including the Fred and Louise Krivoski Endowed Scholarship, the MiraCosta College Foundation Endowed Scholarship and the Brother Benno Foundation EOPS Scholarship.

Rojas is also a member of Phi Theta Kappa, Alpha Chi Lambda chapter, an honors society established in 1918.

“I have more than 100 hours of service learning — a form of experiential education that partners academic instruction with community service. Students learn through participation in organized service activities that are course relevant and meet actual community needs in addition to volunteering in my community,” said Rojas.

She also peer mentors students while enjoying an internship for the school’s sociology department, where she plans campus events for April’s Second Chance month, which highlights the importance of second chances for our returning citizens.

Rojas plans to go to law school, where she will focus on post-conviction relief and parole suitability hearings.

She said her faith in God strengthens her to survive every challenge she faces.

“I spend many hours networking on Zoom with other criminal justice reformers through the Awakening Exchange, an online monthly meeting of nationwide practitioners that focuses on the fields of criminal justice, prison reform and building better humanity,” said Rojas.

Rojas’ period of unemployment allowed her to discover the Rising Scholars Program that provided support for her to excel in school.

“Without this network, I might not be where I am today,” said Rojas.

New ethnic studies course offered to incarcerated students

By William Burley Journalism Guild Writer

An Ethnic Studies curriculum has been added to the already existing educational opportunities for California’s incarcerated population.

“Ethnic Studies is served as a tool to provide a framework, education and skillset to analyze the world from the lens of oppressed people, marginalized people and systems-impacted people. That’s an empowering feat,” said Nate Tan, co-executive director of Asian Prisoners Support Committee.

California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation is a nation-

al leader in higher education, with bachelor’s degree programs at nine of 32 adult institutions, *The Daily Californian* reported July 12, 2023.

California currently offers in-person or distance learning at a college level in every prison, said James King, co-director of programs at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

“Expanding access to credits recognizes the steps that people are taking toward their rehabilitation. Programming creates a safer environment for people in prison and allows them to acquire skills that will help them succeed after prison,” said King.

King pointed out that the Ella

Baker Center, along with its partners, helped pass the Access to Programming Act that became effective in 2022.

The bill reduces barriers to programming and minimizes disruptions through common sense measures, such as continuation of credits when a person is transferred or when a facility is in lockdown.

In addition, Second Chance Pell Experiment has been fully reinstated and is estimated to help 760,000 currently incarcerated individuals pursue degrees, the U.S. Department of Education reported.

SQ’s Mount Tamalpais College does not seek Pell grants because its

funding imposes various limitations, Chief Academic Officer Amy Jamagochian reported.

UC Berkley Journalism Professor William Drummond pointed out that incarcerated individuals at San Quentin also use newspapers when discussing cultural issues and celebrations. He observed that the *San Quentin News* has served as an instrument for acknowledging ethnic groups with articles written in English and Spanish.

While incarcerated at San Quentin, Eddy Zheng participated in the college program that was offered.

The main focus was on getting a degree, which resulted in restrictions

to learning material, Zheng said.

“Because it is a prison environment, some of the literature that the prison administration considered more radical would not be allowed to be in the college program,” Zheng said. “There were many layers of restrictions on the freedom of learning and the freedom of speech.”

The Daily Californian quoted Zheng as saying that after 9/11, he and some friends held town hall-style discussions about offering an Ethnic Studies class inside, and when the administration found out, the group was put in solitary confinement, where Zheng remained for 11 months.

GRADUACION DE LA CLASE DE PERIODISMO EN ESPANOL 2023

ESPAÑOL

Por Arsenio Leyva
Journalism Guild Writer

El 16 de junio en el Centro de Rehabilitación de San Quentin, (CRSQ) la comunidad de habla hispana celebró otro triunfo más, cuando once alumnos de la clase del periodismo se graduaron a lado de 14 estudiantes de la clase de inglés.

El editor y jefe de *SQNews* Steve Brooks, abrió el evento dirigiendo unas palabras a los graduados.

Brooks comentó, “Este evento es para inspirarles para que sean mejores personas.

Estamos aquí para reconocer a la gente y su humanidad. Aquí se le da la oportunidad a las personas que sean vistas y escuchadas. Estamos progresando de tres consejeros a doce, para el periódico. De un periódico de cuatro páginas, a veinticuatro, a una revista, a una carta informativa y contenido con video. No puedes huir de tu pasado, pero puedes re-escribir la historia de tu vida. Podemos cambiar el mundo de uno por uno. Sean instrumentos para cambiar el mundo”.

Este reconocimiento vino después de 26 semanas de aprendizaje, cumpliendo con los requisitos necesarios para completar el curso; los estudiantes aprendieron y se dedicaron a relatar artículos de interés para la comunidad encarcelada.

“¡Es algo inimaginable!, porque nunca pensé compartir con mis compañeros de mi graduación un momento tan feliz, en la peor época de mi vida. Gracias a todos los que hicieron todo esto posible”, emocionadamente concluyó Aristeo Sampablo, graduado del curso y residente de San Quentin.

Los graduados tuvieron el honor de tener puestos sus togas y birretes en la ceremonia y se felicitaron con ¡“Felicidades a la clase del 2022/2023”!

Luego se presentó un video que demostró la historia y retos de cómo nació el periódico *SQNews*.

De los graduados hubo reconocimientos especiales

DERECHA: Vistiendo sus togas y birretes, los estudiantes del periodismo en español están listos a recibir sus certificados en reconocimiento de sus esfuerzos.

IZQUIERDA ABAJO: El consejero del periódico, Jesse Vazquez y el presidente del gremio de periodismo en español, Edwin E. Chavez celebrando con el graduado David Arias. DERECHA ABAJO: Willy Alarcón compartió unas palabras de agradecimiento.

por su participación sobresaliente: Willy Alarcón de la clase de español, Rahan Asaan, Michael Callahan, y Stewart Clarke de la clase de inglés.

Inmediatamente después, el señor y consejero veterano de *SQNews* John Eagan, compartió unas palabras para los graduados diciendo, “quizás nadie les han dicho que están orgullosos de ustedes, pues yo les voy a decir que, ‘¡estoy orgulloso de ustedes!’”, ‘¡estoy orgulloso de ustedes!’”, con entusiasmo los asistentes se pusieron de pie y le dieron aplausos al señor Eagan.

Los presidentes del consejo del periodismo – en español, Edwin E. Chavez, en inglés, Jerry Maleek Gearin – presentaron los graduados para recibir sus certificados.

El presidente Chavez expresó su honor de compartir este día importante con estos nuevos reporteros.

“Yo mismo tuve el privilegio de graduarme en el 2018”, dijo Chavez. “Yo aprendí la importancia de estar informado en *SQNews* durante la pandemia. Imaginate no comprender o saber lo que estaba pasando y no poder recibir la información en tu propio idioma [español]. Nosotros proveemos esta importante información, y es por eso que estoy aquí para informar a nuestros lectores”

El presidente Gearin, graduado del periodismo en el 2017, reconoció la dedicación de sus estudiantes comentando que la clase del 2023 se esforzó haciendo el difícil trabajo, aun durante los encierros [por la pandemia], cuando recibían material a través de las cercas que los separaban para prevenir contaminarse del COVID.



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

La invitada especial, Kaia Stern, Profesora de Reformas Sociales en la Universidad de Harvard dijo, “Fui invitada a este evento el año pasado y realmente fui honrada e inspi-

rada de haber estado aquí. Regresé este año porque todos ustedes me dan esperanza”.

El Director de la prisión Ron Broomfield, ofreció estas palabras ¡“La graduación de los internos me pareció fantástica! Los voluntarios traen un sentido de humanidad, ánimo, conocimiento y pasión que transforma las vidas de nuestro población”.

Byrhonda Lyons, quien fue la principal oradora del evento de graduación y que también es reportera investigadora – donde trabaja con los

que están por graduarse en la Universidad de California en Berkeley – compartió, “Estoy emocionada para conocer los nuevos reporteros de *SQNews*”, añadiendo, “Había perdido la chispa del periodismo pero se re-encendió cuando vine a trabajar como voluntaria aquí en el periódico de *SQNews*”.

Visitando por primera vez, el profesor Andrés Cediel, que imparte clases para el periodismo a los que están por graduarse de Berkeley explicó, “Fue maravilloso ver

la felicidad y orgullo de los estudiantes que se graduaron. Me inspiró el sentido de comunidad que hubo entre ellos”. Agregando alegremente, “Al ver esa unidad se re-encendió la pasión que tengo por el periodismo”.

Este memorable evento concluyó con un gran aplauso y una buena comida para los graduados e invitados. Quedamos a la espera para la siguiente generación de reporteros para *SQNews*.

—Jorge Franco escritor contribuyente

Torneo de dominó trae unión y diversión para toda la comunidad

Por Idalio Villagrán y
Aristeo Sampablo
Spanish Guild Writers

La comunidad hispana se unió para un torneo de Dominó. Este evento anual, les da la oportunidad a los residentes de San Quentin, no solo en competir contra otros de diferentes raíces, pero también les da la habilidad de poder socializarse de una manera saludable.

El día escogido llegó para llevar a cabo el torneo – único entre todas las actividades y deportes que la prisión permite, porque no requiere esfuerzo físico sino cerebral.

En eventos deportivos se descubren a personas atletas que nacen y otros se hacen. Sin embargo estos competidores de habla hispana, se destacan por ser hábiles mentalmente.

Cientos de espectadores, vinieron a disfrutar de la inauguración del torneo, congregándose desde muy temprano en el patio recreativo para observar y deleitarse del acontecimiento.

“[Estoy] emocionado y con mucho optimismo para ganar el siguiente encuentro”, indicó

el residente Roberto García, después de derrotar a su oponente.

Animados, los competidores del evento tan esperado, se dieron manos a la obra poniendo cobijas – en vez de manteles – sobre las mesas, preparando el escenario en donde los gladiadores se enfrentarían y solamente uno de ellos saldría triunfante.

“Para mí lo que están haciendo es productivo para los presos...”, compartió, Utuy Ricardo un espectador del torneo, destacando la actividad rehabilitaría que se disfrazó como una actividad competitiva.

Con muchas ansias, los participantes esperaron su turno para tomar parte en este torneo. Estas competencias ya se han llevado a cabo anteriormente, pero este año atrajo a mucha gente.

Cada uno de los participantes contó con sus grupos de apoyo, quienes los motivaban echándoles porras. “Estuvo reñido el juego”, expresó Jaime Rivera acerca de lo que el experimentó.

Gonzalo Gonzales, el campeón actual del torneo del

año pasado, le gustaría mantenerse invicto y comentó, “Este juego es de suerte, dependiendo las fichas que tenga uno va ganar, ya gané dos, me faltan dos más para ganar el torneo.”

En la contienda en la que Gonzales se enfrentó a Frank Chavez, todos los espectadores estaban muy emocionados por la tensión que se creó y por lo competitivo que se demostraban los contendientes.

Chávez expresó que le gustan los partidos competitivos entre sus compatriotas que comparten de su misma perspectiva.

Ansiosamente García estaba esperando a su contendiente Osman Galicia, que cuando se encontraron se saludaron amistosamente como verdaderos deportistas.

“No se contó con la suficiente estrategia y con contracción para poder ganar el juego”... comentó Galicia oponente de García. “Me hizo sudar porque no quería dar puntos.”

Después de varios enfrentamientos, pasamos a la semifinal. El residente Jorge “España” Spain, se enfrentó a M.



Dao Ong // SQNews

Jugadores de dominó compiten en una rivalidad amistosa.

Medina abatiéndolo para pasar a la final, en donde el campeón González también logró llegar.

En la cima de la rivalidad, estos dos titanes se enfrentaron. Silencio descendió sobre todos y el enfoque para finalizar el campeonato era obvio.

Entre los del público el Sr.

Carlos Ruiz comentó, “Yo me divertí armonizando con mis compañeros; me da mucho gusto compartir el tiempo con tranquilidad”.

El organizador del torneo, Jaime Rivera, nos explicó que el propósito de organizar todo esto siempre ha sido el buscar la unidad, la diversión, como también la paz entre todos de

la comunidad latina – el poder compartir un fin de semana con espíritu de competencia.

Los dos campeones habían sobrepasado a todo otro jugador, sin embargo, en la última contienda. España logró la tan añorada victoria – llevándose el derecho de coronarse como el nuevo campeón del torneo de dominó del 2023.

En California la Justicia Racial trae espranza a miles de reclusos, y sus familiares

Por Jared Rudolph
Escritor Contribuyente

Abogado El presente notifica a los lectores del San Quentin News de la Ley De Justicia Racial (RJA, por sus siglas en inglés) para que se aumente el acceso a personas reclusas.

A partir del primero de enero del 2024, toda persona reclusa en prisión, que haya recibido su condena antes del 2021 y cuyo caso este decidido, puede desafiar la condena o el fallo condenatorio en su caso bajo la RJA (Código Penal, §§ 745, 1437(f)). Un reclamo exitoso bajo la RJA puede anular o modificar la condena o el fallo condenatorio. Presentar un reclamo bajo la RJA no puede traer el resultado de recibir una condena más severa (Código Penal, § 745(e)(2)).

¿Qué es la Ley de Justicia Racial?

La RJA dispone que “El estado no puede solicitar u obtener una condena penal ni imponer un fallo condenatorio en base a la raza, el origen étnico o nacional de la persona.” Existe reclamo valido bajo la RJA cuando:

1. Cualquiera de las partes— el juez, fiscal, abogado defensor, policía, perito, o jurado—muestre prejuicio en contra del acusado debido a su raza, origen étnico o nacional (§ 745(a)(1));
2. Cualquiera de las partes usó lenguaje discriminatorio debido a la raza, origen étnico o nacional del acusado, sea o no a propósito o explicito (§ 745(a)(2));
3. La procuraduría solicitó cargos más severos en contra del acusado a comparación con otros acusados que son miembros de otra raza, origen étnico o nacional (§ 745(a)(3));
4. El tribunal le impuso al acusado una condena más severa en comparación con condenas impuestas a miembros de otra raza, origen étnico o nacional por conducta similar (§ 745(a)(4)(A));
5. El tribunal le impuso al acusado una condena más severa que a otra persona cuya víctima era de otra raza, origen étnico o nacional (§ 745(a)(4)(B)).

El criterio de prueba para determinar una contravención de la RJA es la “preponderancia de las pruebas.” Esto quiere decir

que usted tendrá que demostrar que es más probable que se violó la RJA a que no en su proceso penal. Usted no tendrá que probar discriminación intencional. (Código Penal, § 745(c)(2).)

Contravenciones de la RJA en las primeras dos categorías citadas arriba ((§ 745(a)(1)-(2)) se pueden demostrar a través de transcripciones del tribunal y/o informes policiales. (Vea el caso El Gobierno vs. García (2022) 85 Cal.App.5th 290, 297). Un tribunal de primera instancia en el Condado de Contra Costa recientemente encontró contravenciones de la RJA cuando el fiscal repetidamente uso la palabra que empieza por N y jerga callejera (incluyendo “down-low,” “drug rip,” y “pistol whip”), y presentó la letra de canciones de rap del acusado y videos como prueba (El Gobierno vs. Bryant (3 de octubre, 2022) No. 05-152003-0). En otro caso del Condado de Contra Costa, el uso repetido del término “baby mama” por el fiscal dio raíz a una contravención de la RJA. Aunque estos casos no se pueden citar, representan el tipo de reclamos que pueden tener éxito bajo la RJA. Se determinó que hubo una contravención de la RJA con necesidad de anular el fallo condenatorio cuando un miembro del jurado uso la palabra que empieza por N e hizo generalizaciones basadas en raza durante las deliberaciones. (Vea el caso Stevens vs. Beard (N.D. Cal. 2022) No. 5:13-CV-03877-EJD) 2022 WL 4585836, at *2).

Como demuestran estos casos, la RJA prohíbe el racismo implícito, como el lenguaje con intención oculto, además del racismo explicito. (Código Penal, § 745(h)(3)).

También se debe considerar posibles ejemplos de contravención de la RJA en referencia al nuevo Código de Procedimiento Civil Artículo 231.7(e) (en vigor en el 2022) en el cual la legislatura determinó que la discusión de ciertos temas durante la selección del jurado es presumiblemente discriminatoria, incluyendo: experiencias negativas con o creencias negativas respecto a agentes del orden público, no ser hablante nativo del inglés, tener hijos fuera del matrimonio, vecindarios, elección de ropa u

otras características del aspecto físico, falta de empleo, y más.

La tercera, cuarta o quinta categoría exige que se analice los enjuiciamientos similares en el condado, esta información con frecuencia se puede conseguir registrando una petición bajo La Ley de Archivos. Primero se tiene que demostrar que hubo una base de discriminación por la raza, origen étnico o nacional en su caso y después el Tribunal puede exigirle al gobierno proporcionar más información de la detención y la política de imputación de cargos, resoluciones de casos y cualquier otra información que puede demostrar predisposición racial. (Código Penal, § 745(d); Vea Young v. Tribunal Superior (2022) 79 Cal. App.5th 138, 163.) Por ejemplo, si la policía le detuvo por una infracción de tránsito, pero la información pública demuestra que a las personas de cierta raza se les detiene desproporcionadamente por esa misma infracción, usted puede obtener más revelación de pruebas bajo la RJA. (Vea Young, supra, 79 Cal. App.5th at 159).

¿Cómo hacer un reclamo bajo la RJA?

1. Para entablar una queja bajo RJA, es esencial tener el apoyo legal. Litigando una queja legítima es una tarea enorme para los pocos abogados designados a manejar la RJA. Entendemos que todos quieren que sus reclamos sean procesados lo más pronto posible. Sin embargo, si litigamos muy apresuradamente, los jueces encontraran las razones más pequeñas para negar una moción mal preparada, y esas razones pequeñas se harán ley, excluyendo al resto del estado de este alivio.

Para información adicional acerca de la RJA y ayuda en localizar un abogado, comuníquese con el Centro Ella Baker, 1419 34th Ave., Suite 202, Oakland, CA 94601, y/o Jared T. Rudolph ATTN: RJA, Post Conviction Freedom Project, Oficina Estatal del Defensor Público de San Francisco, San Francisco, CA 94103.

También puede contactar la Oficina Estatal del Defensor Público, a la siguiente dirección: 1111 Broadway, 10th Floor Oakland, California 94607-4139.

¡Anuncio residentes de SQ!

¡La feria anual de libros gratis regresa a la biblioteca!
(patrocinada por los amigos de la biblioteca de San Quentin)



viernes, 1 de diciembre, 2023
en la biblioteca de la prisión



- Tendrán *cientos* de libros en español disponibles
- Podrán mandar libros de alta calidad a sus familiares (menores de edad), *completamente gratis*.
- Habrán libros para todas las edades: desde libros para colorear, hasta de suspenso para los adolescentes.
- Incluye: libros que resaltan la ciencia, el aprendizaje, ¡y lo mejor: tienen títulos que destacan las voces de nuestra comunidad!

Familias inmigrantes continúan separadas

Aun hay mucho más que hacer para rectificar la situación

Por Carlos Drouaillet
Staff writer

El Departamento de Seguridad Interior (DHS) reconoce que hay prácticamente 1,000 niños emigrantes que han sido separados de sus padres por causa del ‘programa de cero-tolerancia’ de la administración de Trump, para detener la inmigración ilegal, según Talal Ansari del *Wall Street Journal*.

Eso es aunque el expresidente Donald Trump anuló la tal llamada ‘Póliza de separación de familias’ corto tiempo después de implementarla, según el artículo.

Las discrepancias dentro del proceso permitieron que padres y niños fueran registrados en diferentes vías migratorias como si no fueran familia, ignorando la pasada póliza de mantener a las familias como un grupo, escribió Ansari.

Como consecuencia, esos infantes fueron separados de sus parientes desde el día que cruzaron la frontera de EE.UU. ilegalmente.

“Nosotros entendemos que nuestro decisivo trabajo no está terminado”, dijo el Secretario del Departamento de Seguridad Interior Alejandro Mayorkas.

Sin embargo, hasta febrero 2, del 2023, el programa nacional ya había colocado a 600 niños emigrantes con sus padres, según las estadísticas del DHS.

Afortunadamente, el ‘Equipo Operativo de Reunificación Familiar’ (‘Family Reunification Task Force’, en inglés) también se ha comunicado con organizaciones no gubernamentales ‘NGOs’ para informar a otras 183 familias acerca de la oportunidad de reunirse con sus seres queridos.

Históricamente, los niños reciben más

protección legal y regularmente se quedan en EE. UU., con parientes o al cuidado de los Centros de Cuidado Infantil, mientras que las peticiones de asilo requeridas por adultos son usualmente rechazadas, terminando en una posible deportación.

La razón por la cual algunos niños continúan separados aun después que fue revocada la póliza de separación-familiar de Trump, es debido a los archivos de ‘historial criminal de los padres’ iniciados por el DHS.

El punto importante aquí es que la agencia encargada de la reunificación familiar trabajó juntamente con organizaciones no-gubernamentales utilizando archivos del gobierno e identificó a 3,924 niños distanciados durante la era de Trump.

Sin embargo, hasta la fecha, solo 2,926 de ellos han sido reunidos con parientes, incluyendo en este número a los que fueron reunidos antes de la creación de la ‘Family Reunification Task Force’, según los datos del DHS.

“Esos niños, quienes fueron injustamente separados de sus padres, quedaran traumatizados por el resto de sus vidas y probablemente dependerán de un largo tratamiento de salud mental para su rehabilitación”, dijo el residente de SQ Jelber Rolando Botello Hernández, de 40 años.

“La ‘Family Reunification Task Force’ continúa coordinando la comunicación con las familias que fueron separadas para asegurar que tengan la oportunidad de reunirse en los EE. UU., y así recibir la ayuda tan necesaria de servicios de ‘salud y comportamiento’, para tratar el trauma que sufrieron”, explicó el señor Mayorkas durante su discurso.

LA IDENTIFICACIÓN ÉTNICA PUEDE INFLUENCIAR EN LA SENTENCIA

LOS DATOS AGLOMERADOS PUEDEN SER USADOS EN CONTRA DEL ACUSADO

Por Willy Alarcón
Staff Writer

Las estadísticas han identificado que ser “latino” puede influir en el proceso legal y aumenta la sentencia criminal.

De acuerdo a la información publicada el 7 de mayo por Marina E. Franco de Axios para Noticias Telemundo, los latinos somos más propensos a ser encarcelados en comparación de otros grupos étnicos – incluso cuando los crímenes sean idénticos.

Este estudio por dos científicos de la universidad de leyes de Oregón, mostró que las personas que fueron identificados como “latinos” por la policía, recibieron castigos más severos que otras etnici-

dades. Esta disparidad ocurre aun cuando dos personas tengan casos similares, en cuanto a

- La severidad del crimen
- El trasfondo criminal

“Esto siempre ha existido”, declaró el residente de San Quentin, Tranquillano Figueroa. “Solo porque somos hispanos, morenos, o ancianos, nos tratan diferente que los que no son como nosotros”.

Según el reporte de Franco, esta reciente investigación muestra como los que son percibidos como “latinos”, basándose en el color de la piel o apariencia física, podrían recibir sentencias más severas en comparación con aquellos que parecen ser de etnicidad “anglosajona” o no

son considerados como “minoría”.

“Si tú sigues las reglas para sentenciar, la idea es que se supone que ya no haya mucho lugar para discreción [personal]...”, dijo Erik Girvan, el coautor del estudio y profesor de leyes. “Aun así, la etnicidad percibida todavía se consideró como importante”.

El estudio muestra que la mayor parte de los datos de etnicidad son registrados por el oficial de policía. En sí, los departamentos de policías y las cárceles generalmente casi no mantienen los datos de etnicidad o raza, añadió el reporte.

Pero basado en los reportes departamentales de corrección de todo el país, los datos de etnicidad sí son existentes, hablando al nivel federal. Y estos reportes claramente muestran que el hombre latino tiene más del doble de probabilidad de ser encarcelado en comparación con el que

es designado “no-hispano”.

Los datos pintan un cuadro de desproporción y discriminación

El reporte añadió que los científicos determinaron, que las personas que fueron identificadas como “hispano/a” son dos veces más propensas a ser sentenciadas a prisión, en comparación de los que son identificados como “blancos o anglosajones” – aunque ellos mismos se identifiquen como “latino/hispano”.

La Sra. Lourdes Rosado, presidenta de Justicia Latina PRLDEF – una organización civil de derechos humanos – recapituló que lo que esto nos dice, es que está establecido que potencialmente hay prejuicios que se deben mitigar.

La Sra. Rosado expresó que, “Nosotros no vamos a mover la aguja hasta que los principales hacedores de decisiones – jueces, personas que hacen la recomendación para

“Solo porque somos hispanos, morenos, o ancianos, nos tratan diferente que los que no son como nosotros”.

—Tranquillano Figueroa

las sentencias, y otros – tengan las duras y frías estadísticas en frente de ellos y sean obligados a establecer metas para reducir esa desproporcionalidad, y sean hechos responsables cuando no lo hagan.”

Pero hay esperanza

Algunos estados ya están comenzando a implementar reformas a los sistemas de justicia criminal. Dos de ellos que podemos destacar son

California y Florida:

- En el estado de California se están aboliendo las “prisiones de juveniles” y en enero del 2024 la ley recientemente titulada, “Acción de Justicia Racial” (Racial Justice Act) tomará efecto como ley retroactiva.
- En el estado de Florida se pasó una ley que está rectificando su sistema de libertad condicional.

El Sr. Girvan está ahora proponiendo implementar grupos que sepan examinar las sentencias basadas en prejuicios antes de que se implementen. Esto reduciría el impacto de decisiones discriminatorias.

Casi el 40% de latinos no fueron identificados por su etnicidad correcta, sino como “anglosajones” en los records estatales.

Sin embargo continua la lucha para cambiar este comportamiento arbitrario.

SPORTS

FAMILY

Continued from page 1

general manager, Brian Asey. “Don Smith and Bill Epling are the ones who keep this program thriving,” Asey said. “It’s more than just basketball.”

Before the game, after the game, and during halftime, the program’s participants gathered in a circle on the court. After a speech and prayer they, as always, broke the huddle with a traditional chant of, “Family!”

Four games were played on the Lower Yard’s court. There was plenty of excitement for all to see, especially for one devoted fan who was in awe of the moment.

“I’m a big fan of the sport,” said outside volunteer Cameron H. “There’s nothing like being at prison on a Saturday morning having fun. This is the best Saturday I ever had. My dad would love this, and I’m sure he would agree that these guys could give the real Warriors a run for their money.”

The SQ Warriors battle the a team from Golden State Warriors’ front office and coaching staff on the Lower Yard annually. However, no big names and cameras were needed on Aug. 26 for players to bring their best.

For the 14 formally incarcerated returning to The Q, Family Day allowed them to express words of reassurance and inspiration.

“Bang bang Niner gang!” said Montreal “Mad Defense” Vines, the ceremoniously recognized former San Quentin Warriors power forward and best defender in the league in his time.

Vines stood at the half-court circle in his Deebo Samuels 49ers jersey and gave a speech about the success he has been blessed to experience since paroling seven months ago.

“I was here with a double life sentence,” Vines said. “I spent 23 years in prison before paroling. This program changed my life and I know if I can do it, so can you.”

Along with the many formerly incarcerated guests, outside volunteers brought their families along with them to enjoy Family Day.

Longtime volunteer Ted Hahs represented the second generation of the three generations of Hahs who were at

Family Day reminds all incarcerated at SQ that they are not without family



SQ Basketball Program's family pose outside the walls in support for the sports program.

the event.

His father, Dale Hahs, came into The Q for the first time and received plenty of greetings from the incarcerated, who felt like they already knew him from their regular chats with Ted.

“He has five kids, 25 grand kids and 10 great grands,” Ted proudly said about his father.

Pop Dale sat on the sideline eagerly anticipating the game with his grandson, Vick Hahs.

As the games unfolded, Vick Hahs — who averages 20 points-per-game — didn’t get the opportunity to “let loose” his usual dominant play displayed on his frequent visits to the prison.

“It means a lot to me to have grandpa here with us,” Vick said. “It’s good to see him feeling better and living long enough to experience this. It means a lot to me.”

Aside from the teams showing out with their athleticism, Rahsaan “NY” Thomas’ old friends urged him to buy quarterly food packages for everyone after hearing that he now earns a six-figure-income juggling multiple careers on the outside.

Allan “Black” McIntosh, another formerly incarcerated player, confessed he would not be playing anywhere near the level he used to when he was the SQ Warriors’ leading scorer.

His “not as good as I used to be” was displayed on the

FAMILY DAY ALL-STAR GAME

SQ Warriors Coaches:
Head Coach - Jeremiah Brown
Asst. Coach - Jay Eurich

Team Managers:
Max Romero
Ray Abasta

SQ Kings Coaches:
Head Coach - K. "Ish" Freelon
Asst. Coach - Trevor Woods

Formerly Incarcerated Basketball Program Athletic Success:

Aaron Taylor	Anthony Ammonds
Allan McIntosh	Aubra McNeely
Cesar McDonell	Danny Cox
Isaiah Caldwell	Jason Jones
Joe Demerson	Montreal Vines
Rahsaan Thomas	Robert Butler

were doing more than just inspiring the ones still incarcerated. They were proving to society that people do not need a decades-long indeterminate sentence for a person being to be rehabilitated.

While all of the 14 men hold steady jobs with good careers, one of them — Anthony Ammonds — is working at the state office of the California attorney general, Rob Bonta.

Since coming out from under a 102 years plus life sentence, Ammonds began working for Bonta as a community specialist.

Ammonds, who was known as “Half Man, Half Amazing,” was a beast on the court as a former shooting guard for the SQ Warriors. Coming back into the prison to see the old friends he left behind after paroling two years ago was a heartfelt moment.

“It’s sad, but I feel home,” Ammond said. “No one should ever say prison feels like home, and maybe it’s just the post-incarceration speaking, but it feels good to see old friends.”

Those still here were just as excited to see their paroled friends again.

“I think it’s a very positive thing,” said resident Eric Moss.

Moss was had been here with all 14 of the formally incarcerated men — they had walked the tiers together, ate in the dining hall together, and played on the basketball courts together. So seeing some of his old friends and former athletes back as free men was especially gratifying.

“It gives us still here some positivity and a feeling of hope,” Moss said. “We were all here together, so to see them come in here to support us gives me hope. I really thank the administration for allowing this to happen. This helps with our rehabilitation and it show that we are together — as family.”

Spectators on the sideline enjoyed the comedic commentary of Aaron “Showtime” Taylor, who continues the craft he learned in prison as SQNews’ sports editor since he paroled.

“I represent you whether you know it or not, no matter if you like me or not — it’s not about you, it’s about us,” Taylor said.

Since getting out, “Showtime” Taylor has definitely raised the bar by commentating for the Golden State Warriors and being a guest on the Kelly Clarkson Show.

Longtime volunteer Cori “Cuzzin Cori” T. had never been to one of the prison’s basketball games before this summer and he came away impressed.

“It won’t be my last,” Cori said. “It’s exciting and I’m moved with emotions just watching all of the joy shared between everybody.”

Team Town Boogie inspires SQ Warriors to new levels of dedication



Members of outside basketball team Town Boogie were all smiles in the parking lot of San Quentin after a game on the Lower Yard's court.

Randy C. Thompson
Staff Writer

Outside basketball team Town Boogie took on the San Quentin Warriors in a game that surprised the visitors with a level of competitiveness they were not expecting — the Warriors beat Town Boogie 91-78. It was the visitor’s first loss against a SQ team this season, bringing their record to 1-1 with the Warriors and 3-0 with the SQ Kings.

“Basketball is the great escape,” said Town Boogie’s Geoffrey “Free” Gary, who founded the team. “It is the last place a person can holler, let your adrenaline run wild, and it is accepted.”

Gary had been coming into The Q to play ball for six years before starting Town Boogie. On this occasion, Free and his team strode onto the yard with confidence, fresh off a dominant 113-60 victory over the Kings. However, the Warriors are not the Kings, a fact that Town Boogie was reminded of the hard way.

Gary said that he built his team with the goal of bringing an inspirational spirit of friendly competition to the court. He recruited men from the Bay Area high school where he works as the head coach of the basketball team. Gary also

recruited players from other outside teams that visit The Q.

Powerhouse players on team Town Boogie include Damien Crosby, Adha Mengis, Andrew Wallace, and Matt Daly. Star player Authman Ibrahim said he has “hella fun” putting up his average 30 points and 10 rebounds per game.

Town Boogies’ gentle giant, Sam Permutt, also averages a high number of rebounds every game. He said that his favorite part of playing at The Q is the gratitude shown by the basketball community here.

Last but not least is Colin Whitten, a slam dunker who recently had a record game of 37 points and 17 rebounds against the Kings in mid-July. He was inspired to come to The Q after watching the documentary, “QBall.”

Head coach of the Warriors, Jeremiah Brown, also brought his team onto the court feeling confident, in part due to his heavily detailed scout sheet for each member of Town Boogie, including strengths, weaknesses, and defensive notes for stopping them.

“The keys to victory are to lock out Sam, rotate our players to tire out their defense, and double early to open the post for Drizzy [Cooper, the Warriors center],” he said before the game.

True to the plan, the Warriors rotated often, utilizing their full roster to keep constant pressure on the tiring Town Boogie. Gary’s undefeated team fought on, with calls from Mengis to, “Play hard and sub.”

Despite being visibly exhausted, Town Boogie didn’t let the Warriors just have the victory. At the end of the fourth quarter, they brought the Warriors’ lead down to ten.

While Brown’s keys to victory definitely made a difference, none of the planning would have mattered if it wasn’t for the lightning and thunder combo of Warriors’ stars Keyshawn “Steez” Strickland and Mason Ryan. Together they put up 60 points — two-thirds of the team’s overall score.

“It was a great win,” Brown said. “Our players kept to their assignments and that made the difference. We avenged our brothers [the SQ Kings].”

While Gary was upset at having to take a loss, he showed respect for the hard work and effort of the Warriors players.

“They came prepared and they were hungry,” Gary said. “If I can say anything to the incarcerated, it would be to keep your heads up, stay strong, and let this be motivation for you.”

GIANT ADVICE FOR SPORTS COMMUNITY

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

The San Francisco Giants mental health team shared some practices for managing mental health with San Quentin residents on September 10 in the Garden Chapel to help launch Mental Wellness Week. One of the topics discussed was mental health in sports.

Moderator Luis Light introduced the guest, Dr. Shana A., Dr. Emily P., and former SF Giants player Drew Robinson, who shared some personal experiences and mental health best practices with a packed room of residents in the Garden Chapel. Residents were giving a free session of mental health therapy by professionals who help professional athletes be the best in the world at what they do.

“We came to kick off mental health week,” said Dr. Shana A. “The Giants mental health team is here to talk about why the Giants prioritize mental health and give some take away skills for all in attendance.”

Dr. Shana A. coached residents through a much-needed session of meditation techniques that many residents said they really needed.

“This was the favorite part for me,” said one resident. “It opened my mind. I breathed in and out and it actually took the tension away from me,” said another resident.

Dr. Shana A. gave the crowd other ways to practice on cognitive behavioral therapy such as using positive



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Members of the San Francisco Giants organization spoke with residents on the importance of mental wellness and suicide prevention, including for athletes.

self-talk, identifying positive traits, and focusing on what is going well for them.

San Quentin's 1000 Mile Club President Tommy Wickerd told his story about attempting suicide at a young age, and how running helps him deal with the stress of prison and maintain his men-

tal health.

Dr. Emily P. emphasized that running and exercise is a good source of relieving stress. “Running gives you a lot of strength mentally. I’m an avid runner myself,” she said.

The guests also noted that having pets helps keep anger and unhappy feelings away,

which is one of the benefits of The Q's new dog program.

Despite being a professional athlete, Robinson struggled with depression. He told his story of surviving an suicide attempt in which he lost an eye. He stressed the importance of recognizing depression and suicidal symptoms if

they arrive because addressing symptoms is a key to prevention.

“Pay attention to yourself,” he said.

Among the symptoms Robinson listed were chronically “feeling down or sad, holding back tears or crying, on edge or difficulty sleep-

ing, change in appetite, irritability, isolation, thoughts of hurting yourself or not being around, and thoughts or plans to end your life.”

After telling the crowd about his story, Robinson said, “I’m trying to heal loudly to stop others from dying silently.”

TIER TALK

Kolby Southwood shares the importance of self-care in mental health

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

There are many different circumstances to note why guys have mental issues in their lives. All American San Quentin sports program athlete Kolby Southwood, 30, was no exception when he encountered the tumultuous times in his life that led him down a pathway of destruction. However, through his love for sports, he was able to find that much needed resolve to carry through those trying times.

Timothy Hicks: You're a busy man, I finally have the opportunity to get an interview with you. It's unfortunate that you have an injury right now. It's bitter sweet. Sweet for me. (Smiles) But I understand. It's a good thing to see you being busy with all the sports teams you are on, plus other programs you are a part of.

Kolby Southwood: Yeah, man it's a pleasure to be interviewed. Yeah I had surgery on my elbow. An injury that happened when I was young. I finally took the time out to get it fixed.

TH: Ok cool, I'm glad that at least it wasn't a sports related injury. The teams are still going to suffer from your absence. What are all the sports you play here at the prison? And have you always played sports growing up?

KS: I almost played sports my whole life. I play on almost all of the sports team here. All but the basketball teams. I do play that too though. I am a receiver/defensive back on the SQ Niners football team. I play forward, left wing and mid fielder on the SQ Earthquake soccer team. I play second base and short-stop on the SQ Giants baseball team and third base and short-stop on the SQ Hardtimers softball team.



“Coming to jail and prison saved me. Now, I'm the best version of me.”

TH: How was it like growing up for you?

KS: Life growing up for me was hard. I had a head injury when I was a kid. I had to wear a helmet and I got teased a lot. I couldn't communicate with the other kids as much and that affected me mentally. It wasn't until I started playing sports that I could connect with the other kids like a normal person.

TH: That sounds like a tough time for you, I'm sorry to hear that. Have you faced any other tough circumstances in your life?

KS: Yes, it was tough as a kid. But, on top of that I also became homeless when I got a little older. I had stop playing sports before then. It was tough not knowing where I was going to sleep or where my next meal was going to come from. And on top of all that, I had developed a serious Meth addiction. That was my drug of choice.

TH: What saved you from that life?

KS: Coming to jail and prison saved me. Now, I'm the best version of me. I'm sober and clean with a clear head. I'm comfortable of who I am today. I'm the captain of the softball team and I teach others how to play their positions. I'm partaking in the college course hear and in the Coding program because I want to be a website engineer. We have a tattoo removal program here that I'm taking advantage of because I don't want to have no more constant reminders of the old me.

1000 MILE CLUB HOSTS SECOND ANNUAL 5K WALK, JOG, OR RUN

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

Doing their part to promote metal wellness, San Quentin's 1000 Mile Club hosted a 5K run along with a 26.2-mile marathon relay on Friday, Sept. 15 on the Lower Yard. Over 200 residents walked, jogged, or ran the 12 laps for the 5K run, having fun and building community in the process.

“It's all about taking the stigma away from mental wellness,” said Club President Tommy Wickerd. “This is our second annual mental wellness 5K. We are supporting mental wellness one step at time, and our 26.2 mile relay is supporting mental wellness one mile a time.”

One of the runners who participated in the marathon relay was Jaime “Happy” Paredes, who is part of SQ's deaf community. “I'm excited to support mental health and suicide prevention, to help others stay positive,” Paredes said through an interpreter, his friend Esteban Lopez.

Paredes shared that he has lost people to suicide, which is why he is so passionate about getting the word out to help prevent this tragedy. “Running keeps you happy, keeps your mental health strong,” he said.

Lopez was on one of the six, relay teams with Wickerd, Paredes, and two other deaf runners.

“I'm just here to support the deaf community to raise awareness about the hidden mental health struggles they go through — it's hard for them to tell someone because of being deaf,” said Lopez, who will soon be graduating from Wickerd's American Sign Language class. “I'm an advocate for them, someone they can talk to and get things off their chest. I'm here to be part of



Aristeo Sampablo // SQNews intern

Participants were given wristbands and certificates to honor their dedication to supporting mental wellness by walking, jogging or running 5K.

the community, to be part of the San Quentin positive culture.”

Several of the participants spoke about how much running helps their physical health, which in turn helps their mental health.

H-Unit's Scott Lewis, 50, speed walks regularly and was glad to participate. “It gets me outside, gets me out of bed, gets me moving and helps me accomplish my goal to lose weight, which supports my mental health. I've lost about 40 pounds so far, and I've got about 35 to go,” Lewis said.

Longtime club runner John Levin used running to overcome heart disease and triple-bypass surgery and also relies on it to keep his spirits up.

“No matter how old your brain thinks you are, I learned today it's never a good idea to run five miles after eating a pint of chocolate chip, cherry ice cream,” Levin joked after running the marathon relay.

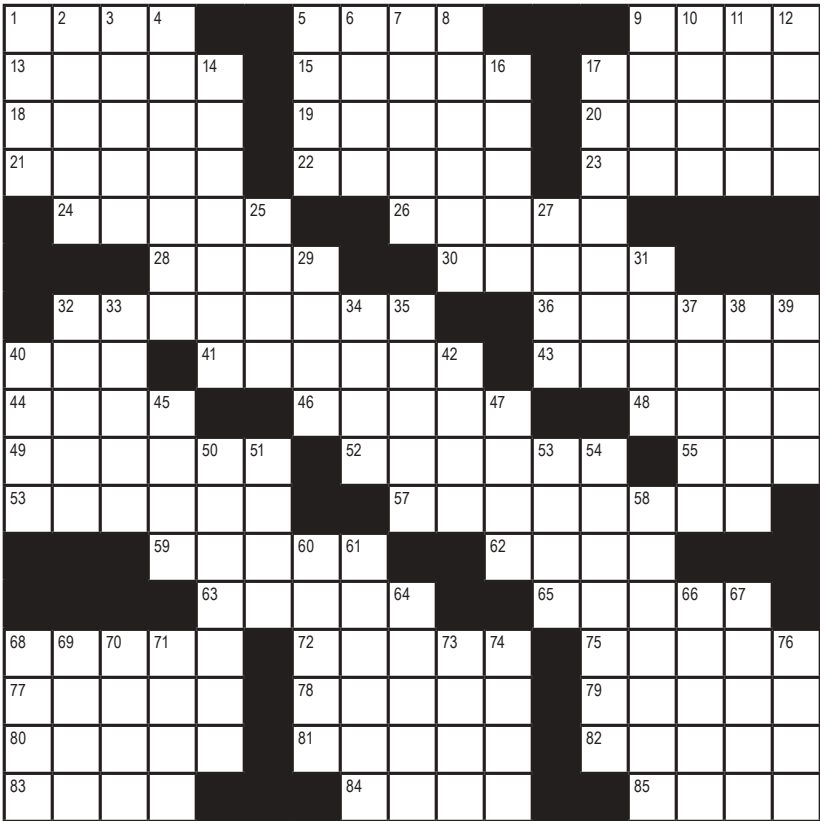
As the runners circled the Lower Yard, live music reverberated from the stage. “This is a masquerade and I showed up without my mask,” rang out the lyrics. “You may think it's all wrong, but I'm alright.”

Wickerd cheered on the runners on with his trademark smile and upbeat attitude. “We want to show that walk, jog, or run is a coping mechanism,” Wickerd said. “We love coming together to support such an awesome event for a good purpose.”

CROSSWORD CLASSIC

Created by Jonathan Chiu

Edited by Jan Perry



- Across
1. The red planet

5. Sister-wife of Zeus

9. Gradually weakens

13. Type of fatty acid used in soaps

15. Escape

17. Former Republican hopeful: Marco ____

18. A major Central African river

19. OTC headache drug for women

20. Flower clusters with stalks of nearly equal length

21. *Matrix* actor: ____ Reeves

22. Carpenter's tool for shaving wood

23. Lifers' dreaded gateway to freedom

24. Shoot from a hidden position

26. *Addams Family* actress: Christina ____

28. People of wealth status (Brit slang)

30. Dialog featuring alternating lines of verse (abbr)

32. Flowering ornamental shrub well-loved in Mississippi

36. Restroom essential equipment

40. Universal heat source

41. Bad-tempered

43. To convert (a message) to hidden form

44. Hawkeye of M*A*S*H: Alan ____

46. Columbus' first port of departure

48. Kaepernick takes one for the National Anthem

49. Wall holder for candles

52. Lacking value or virtue (2 wds, slang)

55. Service needed at accident scene (abbr)

56. Make a strenuous effort

57. SQN alumnus: Aly ____

59. You either have it or you don't

62. Either awesome (slang) or just unwell

63. Synthetic fiber

65. Prison sentences

68. Relating to the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia

72. Relating to vision (comb. form)

75. Supermodel: ____ Campbell

77. Over-priced staple of prisoners' diets

78. Valley in Argolis, Greece

79. Oceanic movements driven by the moon

80. Multiple groups of consecutive written items

81. To move stealthily

82. A short gut-line used in fishing

83. The animals that precede Lodge

84. You make this meet

85. Women's fashion magazine
- Down

1. Tease or mimic

2. Type of medicinal succulent

3. Fr. author: Joseph Ernest ____; author of controversial *Life of Jesus* (1863)

4. Speaking, for the Deaf

5. Fibrous rope-making material

6. Worse than bad

7. M*A*S*H radio operator's handle

8. Young lover of both Persephone and Aphrodite

9. Wrestling, if you go far enough west

10. Aramaic » Greek: "Daddy"

11. A cutwater or jetty

12. Favorite signage of Realtors

14. Supermarket savers

16. To choose

17. A point of no return

25. Dark brown or black

27. To quote as evidence

29. It can be a front or a back-hand

31. Hillbilly, or hayseed

32. A mandatory fine

33. One, the other, or both (2 wds)

34. Covert Mid-East buyer of American weapons during Reagan presidency

35. To apportion

37. Definitely not a social butterfly

38. Dropsy

39. What a golfer does before taking a swing

40. Cheek

42. Hindu asceti discipline

45. Winds of SoCal: Santa ____ (pl)

47. CDCR's internal resident-tracking prog.

50. Like a lemon, only bigger

51. "A Day Without Rain" artist

53. Death notice (abbr)

54. A teacher, but not quite a professor

58. Not a Putin ally

60. Empire family

61. Second Tertiary epoch (geol)

64. A presiding spirit or divine power

66. Henry Ford's first mass-produced vehicle: ____-T

67. Olfactory

68. Narrow inner border of a shield

69. Once ridden by hobos

70. City in S. Russia on the Irtysh River

71. NY baseball team

73. Type of heavy metal poisoning

74. Trees for which "the Town" was named

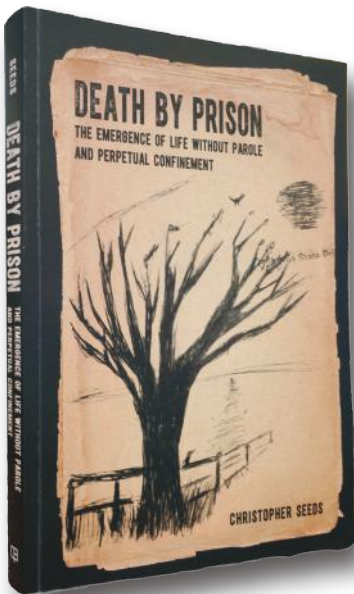
76. Ireland: The Emerald ____

BOOK REVIEW

DEATH BY PRISON

THE EMERGENCE OF LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE AND PERPETUAL CONFINEMENT

By Christopher Seeds



By David Ditto
Associate Editor

Christopher Seeds’ *Death by Prison: The Emergence of Life without Parole and Perpetual Confinement* details how life without parole, scarcely imposed in America 50 years ago, became the cruel, widely-used, widely-accepted practice it is today.

Published in 2022, Seeds’ authoritative book points out that although other forms of punishment are decreasing, life without parole (LWOP) sentences continue to increase. The number of people serving LWOP has exploded more than 20-fold over the last 50 years and is still growing today.

Death by Prison explains why. Seeds begins by describing, challenging, and reframing the roles of two factors commonly perceived to have caused the rise of LWOP sentencing: mass incarceration and the search for an alternative to the death penalty.

A backlash against the civil rights gains of the 1960s fueled the nation’s turn away from a rehabilitative model to a punitive model. The resulting tough-on-crime penal policy approach, with its war on drugs and three-strikes laws, fueled mass incarceration and played a part in the increased use of extreme sentences like LWOP.

The anti-death penalty movement also played a pivotal role in the rise of LWOP. But Seeds reports that the movement resisted embracing LWOP as an alternative to the death penalty for decades, until the 1990s, when LWOP was already quickly increasing for other reasons.

Death by Prison delves deeper into America’s problematic turn to imprisoning people until their death.

Seeds’ extensive research definitively documents how major upheavals in the field of criminal justice in the 1970s and 1980s generated institutional responses from states, the U.S. Supreme Court, and correctional departments.

Many states shifted from indeterminate to long fixed sentences. Many cut way back on parole and commutation.

For decades prior to the 1970s, life without parole offered a reasonable possibility of release through clemency. When states curtailed the pathways to freedom, however, Seeds says, “life without parole became perpetual confinement.”

In other words, LWOP didn’t simply expand, it transformed.

The U.S. Supreme Court temporarily invalidated the death penalty in 1972, and then spent the rest of the century ambivalently crafting LWOP into a distinctly severe, yet acceptable and widespread punishment, according to Seeds.

Corrections departments resisted perpetual confinement in the 1970s because prisoners with nothing to lose were a safety risk. LWOP was later embraced by administrations, however, when prison budgets and prison building exploded in the 1990s.

Seeds’ investigation reveals not only what caused the emergence of LWOP, but also, what enabled it. The chief enabler, Seeds argues, is disregard. His book “reveals how disregard itself is institutionalized in American punishment.”

Institutional and societal disregard of the indignity of growing old and dying in prison provided fertile ground for LWOP to grow. Where pubic resistance was expected, instead there was acquiescence. Concerns regarding LWOP’s human rights violations, racial disproportionality, and financial burden were neglected.

Seeds documents how the emergence of LWOP, by institutionalizing the idea and commonplace practice of imprisonment until death, forged a path for expansion of other forms of perpetual confinement.

“Judges...were intentionally imposing exorbitant minimum sentences to prevent parole review and impose de facto LWOP sentences beyond where the leg-

islature authorized,” he writes. Decades- and even centuries-long sentences condemned many people who are still dying behind prison bars today.

Life sentences with parole also become perpetual confinement when parole is never granted.

“Parole boards may deny release with little regard for a prisoner’s efforts at rehabilitation, focusing instead on circumstances of the offense that will never change,” writes Seeds.

“Many parole-eligible prisoners are held perpetually...California is an example.” Similar judicial and parole practices in many states essentially turned life with parole to life without parole in the 1970s and 80s.

Five states together imprison more people with LWOP than all the other states combined: Fla., Pa., Calif., La. and Mich. The U.S. held 56,000 people imprisoned with LWOP sentences in 2020.

Death by Prison documents how LWOP has become a death penalty that is not only cruel and neglectful, but also racially unjust. In Pennsylvania, for example, Black people are sentenced to LWOP at 18 times the rate of White people.

Will current criminal justice reform efforts relieve the LWOP problems? Seeds says no.

He says current reforms aim to abolish the death penalty and reduce imprisonment for low-level crimes, but leave people serving life and long terms to grow old and die in prison. “More perpetual confinement,” Seeds says, “is the promise of contemporary reform.”

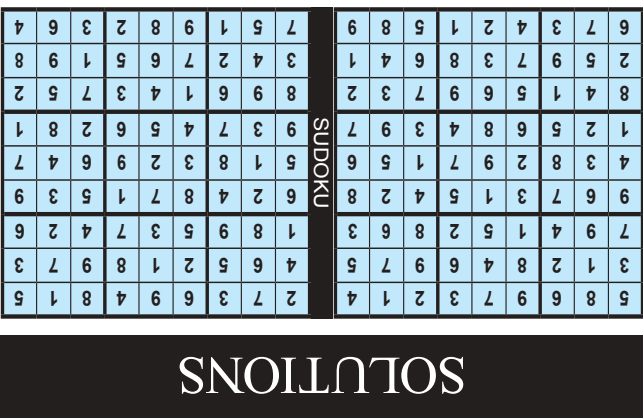
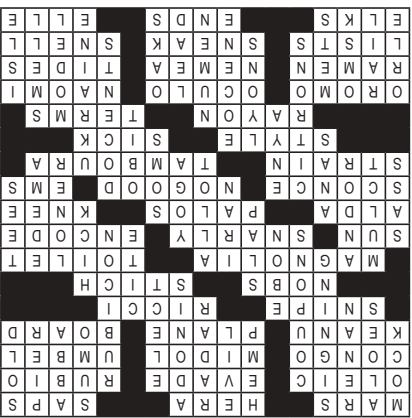
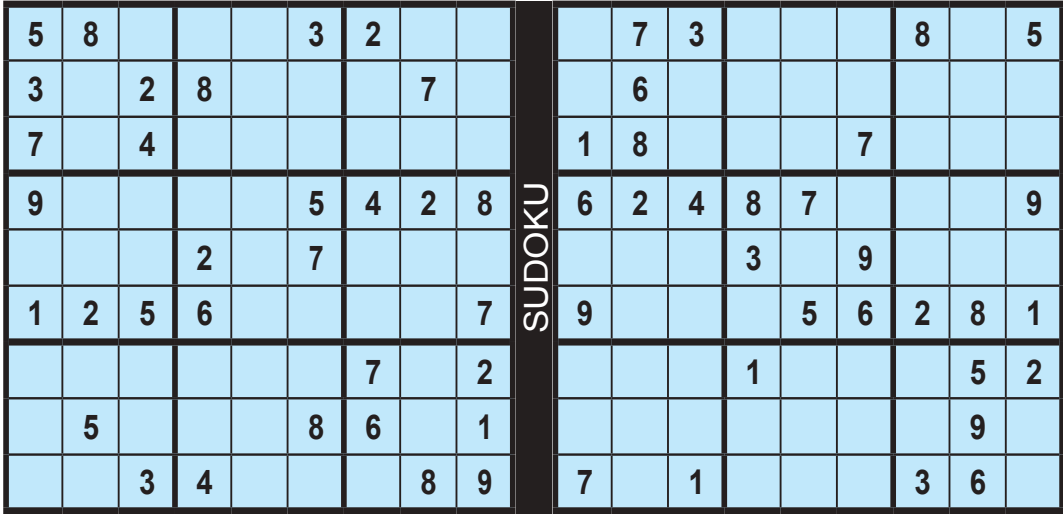
What, then, is the solution?

Seeds says that in order to stop the growth of LWOP’s widespread cruelty, America must critically scrutinize, discuss and adapt its penal policy with mindfulness of the dignity of the people it imprisons.

Christopher Seeds is Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine and was previously a capital defense lawyer.

Death by Prison is essential reading for all of us who are serving life or long sentences. It reveals the troubling panorama of neglectful causes and harsh effects of America’s turn to punitively extreme sentences in which we are trees dying captive inside an expanding forest.

Every prison library needs a dozen copies of *Death by Prison* now.



SNOLN7OS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



CONCERNED READER SHARES HER OPINION

Dear SQNews:

I am a trans woman, incarcerated 43 years, and a frequent reader of *San Quentin News*. The *News* gets around, and has come a long way since my SQ days in the early 1980s.

I'm writing because I believe the newspaper should have a transgender staff writer.

The treatment of incarcerated transgender people in America is troubling. We are a nationally and internationally oppressed and persecuted class, especially in CDCR.

We need to tell our stories and be represented alongside other coverage of prison life — good, bad, and ugly — the same as everyone else.

I remember a day when LGBTQ+ people were not harassed on the yard; when it was considered weak to prey on the weak. Today, we can't be housed on Level-IV general population yards, or we will be killed. Matters like this need to be addressed.

In California, trans women are now being housed in women's prisons. This is a monumental, historic change in status quo. Yet *SQNews* failed to celebrate the shift — an inexcusable failure.

We deserve permanent representation at *SQNews*. We should be a part of this impressive and successful news outlet.

In summation, on behalf of the trans population of CDCR, I ask that *SQNews* appoint a transgender staff writer to cover trans events from our perspective, and I volunteer for the position.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

—Eva Reeves
Central California Women's Facility

Hi, Eva! Thank you for writing. You'll notice that per our submission guidelines your letter has been edited for length and language. However, your words are provocative and certainly deserve an answer.

First, Cassandra Evans is a Journalism Guild grad and incarcerated trans woman whose byline frequently appears on our pages. Her dedicated reporting covers issues of impor-

tance to the *Queer* community. Our senior layout designer is also a member of the community who pulls double-duty as a staff writer, covering LGBTQ+ topics as well.

However, we would gladly consider any content you submit, covering the incarcerated *Queer* population or any other topic. Please check out our guidelines for submission on page 3.

Second, our core mission is to report on programs and opportunities that meet the rehabilitative needs of the incarcerated. By equipping people for successful reentry, we are working to increase public safety and achieve social justice. Everything we produce — our newspaper, *Wall City* magazine, *Criminal Justice News*, law enforcement forums, symposiums — is all geared toward this one goal.

Lastly, Senate Bill 132, the *Transgender Respect and Dignity Act*, is a hot-button we haven't touched due to ongoing legal challenges and, frankly, out of consideration for incarcerated, cisgender survivors in California women's prisons.

The core tenets we strive for when reporting on high-profile issues are fairness, balance, and integrity. You're right: TRADA turned the status quo on its ear for trans prisoners; it's a resounding win for trans and nonbinary people in prison who only want to be safe in their housing assignments. The law instructs CDCR to prioritize incarcerated trans/nonbinary persons' perception of safety in making housing assignments, and as you mentioned, it also allows incarcerated transgender people to be housed at prison facilities according to their gender identity.

But that's only half of the story, isn't it? It would be irresponsible and thoughtless of us to celebrate TRADA without considering its very real, very human impact on some incarcerated, cisgender women. For those who have survived horrific traumas at the hands of men, TRADA may not represent a cause for celebration.

It would be next to impossible to do the story the justice it deserves without causing more harm to these survivors, and our incarcerated Editorial Board made the difficult decision not to cover it.

WASCO MAN SETS HIS SIGHTS ON THE Q

Dear SQNews,

My name is John Hecker. I am currently housed at Wasco State Prison, and I am writing out of desperation and commitment. For a better life, for me and my family.

I am no stranger to the system, but I am ashamed at myself for being here again. I am 53 years old with a wife and 4 kids. I do not want the same old thing with the same results. I am doing 22 years now on a new sentence. If I do not change and handle business I will never get out and be a man who takes care of his family- who I claim to love right. My actions have to back up the claim.

I am writing out of desperation to go to San Quentin. I do not want the criminal life and wandering yards not accomplishing anything. I read, see, and am aware San Quentin has many opportunities for a man to man up. I am ready, I want to change, take care of my family, work hard, and earn my freedom. I will sign any chrono-waiver whatever it takes to go to San Quentin. Please do not misunderstand my honesty. I am dead serious about going to San Quentin.

Straight up I am willing to program and prove myself. I am going to pray, hope, and assume this is received with grace.

—John Hecker
Wasco State Prison
Wasco, California

WASCO SENDS APPRECIATION AND THANKS TO SQNEWS

Dear SQNews,

I really enjoy your newspaper and think you all are doing a great thing for all of the incarcerated. What I especially enjoy is all the great photos and the positivity and good coverage of so many useful topics.

I am currently at Wasco and finding your newspaper was very uplifting to the spirit. Seeing other incarcerated accomplishing goals and succeeding in programs is really motivating.

Thank you for keeping us in the loop.

—Adrian Garcia
Wasco State Prison
Wasco, California

EDITORIAL



Courtesy Emily Harris // Ella Baker Center

Hidden dangers of climate change for the incarcerated revealed in report

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

A new report reveals the hidden dangers that incarcerated people face in California as a result of climate change.

Hidden Hazard: The Impact of Climate Change on Incarcerated People in California State Prisons is authored by a team of UCLA researchers. They were assisted by Macio Lindsey, the inside fellow at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights; incarcerated journalist Juan Haines; and me.

Nowadays when it's dark outside it may not necessarily be night. I learned this from the plume of smoke that filled the red-sunned sky during the wildfires of 2019. When I walked outside of North Block housing unit at San Quentin State Prison, I thought I had been teleported to planet Mars. From 2017 through 2020, California saw some of the worst wildfires, structural damage and death than any other time in recorded history.

"Climate change isn't arriving, it's already happening," writes Haines in an op-ed for *KneeDeep Times*.

The climate report, done on behalf of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC), focuses on floods, wildfires and extreme hot and cold temperatures. It addresses the question: "What policy alternatives can reduce the impact of climate hazards on those incarcerated in California's prison system?"

Earlier this year, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency after a series of rainstorms led to intense flooding. Floods in the prison and farming town of Corcoran put the community underwater. Incarcerated people in two prisons were on the verge of evacuation. Several months later Hurricane Hilary set its sights on California after tearing through Mexico. Some towns saw more rain in one day than in a whole year.

"In 30-plus years of incarceration, besides blackouts, I've endured earthquakes, heat waves and flooding. I've made it through winters in which an extra blanket was the only thing that separated me from the icy-cold air gushing in and out of my small cramped cell," said Haines.

The key findings in this report reveal that incarcerated people are distinctly vulnerable to climate hazards because they are dependent on CDCR for preparedness, response and recovery. CDCR prisons are highly affected by climate hazards because they are located in or near remote areas, have an aging infrastructure and population, and are overcrowded.

The CDCR manual does not mention wildfires, flooding or extreme temperatures, which suggests no emergency planning, according to *Hidden Hazards*.

I spoke with researcher Maura O'Neill several times by telephone and during one-hour video visiting sessions at San Quentin. We were still wearing COVID-19 masks and social distancing. She listened attentively as I explained the reality of prison life.

"One of the most disturbing findings of our report is that 71% of currently incar-

cerated people we surveyed said they believed that in a climate emergency, prison staff would lock them in their cell and leave the facility for their own safety," O'Neill wrote in an email. The experiences people shared of instances where they were locked in their cell during earthquakes, tsunamis, power outages and threats of wildfire make it clear why so many people believe this."

I was training for marathons during these historic wildfires. The air quality was so bad I was breathing burnt embers and this affected my asthma. The San Quentin marathon was cancelled and I was advised to stay indoors. I got sunburns during my summers at Centinela prison. I sat in sweltering heat during rolling blackouts because of power grid failures. I froze in the cells of High Desert during snowy winters because I had no access to thermals.

California is a leader when it comes to addressing climate change in the United States, but many state policies tend to exclude incarcerated people. The California Office of Emergency Services, State Emergency Plan, a manual that outlines the role and responsibilities of state agencies during emergencies, has no clear guidelines for protecting incarcerated people.

A 2018 report from the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research provides a definition for vulnerable communities in the context of climate change. It excludes incarcerated people.

Researchers found that CDCR does have an Emergency Heat Plan for incarcerated people. It is limited to those on psychotropic medications or other heat-related problems. But for those who are elderly or vulnerable in other ways, no clear plan exists.

"...access to amenities, like ice on sweltering days, are not made available to currently incarcerated people," said O'Neill. "At the same time we learned of the failures of California prisons in keeping its inhabitants cool, we came across research on the severe health impacts of heat, particularly for older and medicated individuals. In prison, there seems to be no escaping the dangerous heat."

When I first came to prison I figured extreme discomfort is the price you pay for committing a crime. I assumed an expectation of being tortured. But then the question in my mind became: for how long? How much torture? For what types of crimes?

The more harm people suffer in prison, the more trauma they endure, the more the idea of rehabilitation is defeated. The more harm, the more money taxpayers have to pay. It currently costs \$106,000 a year to incarcerate one individual in California.

This report recommends that California reduce its prison population by at least fifty-percent. It also recommends that California update its emergency plan to recognize the vulnerability of incarcerated people, among other recommendations.

EBC is hoping this report will lead to more research and policy changes that will minimize injuries and deaths and lead to more closures of prisons. "I'm glad it's finally out in the world," said Emily Harris, EBC co-policy director.

SAN QUEN-TOONS

BY JESSIE MILO (2023)





“My art is inspired by my ancestors and my imagination, which is a combination of cultures.”
—William Harrison

ANCESTRAL INSPIRATION FUELS IMAGINATION

Harrison brings his ancestors to life with cardboard art

By Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

William “Divine Rival” Harrison, 53, a new arrival at San Quentin after 29 years of incarceration, embraces his roots and culture with the stroke of a pencil or a brush. He sketches much of his art on cardboard.

“My art is inspired by my ancestors and my imagination, which is a combination of cultures,” said Harrison. He said that his inspirations “depend on the pictures that I draw [and whether they] strike [up] a conversation.”

In addition to prison, his art has been recognized on the outside. In 2022, the San Diego Convention Center featured Harrison as a contributing artist, displaying his works.

As an artist, he loves to mix media and combine watercolors, color pencils, pastels and acrylic paint.

The women he draws pay homage to all the women in his life and in everyone’s life, from Angela Davis, the African-American activist; to Aretha Franklin, the famous singer; to Cicely Tyson,

the activist and actor. As an artist, Harrison wants to bring awareness to the impact that all these women have had on his community.

“When I was transferred to Centinela State Prison, I had a lot of art supplies and they took all my art supplies upon arrival,” said Harrison. Many of the artists featured in *San Quentin News* have had challenges or setbacks, but Harrison refuses to give up on his craft.

“I was upset about the restrictions, which led me to be more creative, and through it I started using regular cardboard as a canvas.”

After reflecting, Harrison feels that he owes recognition not only to these famous women but also to his mother, aunts, grandmother and the women in his life.

In the piece titled “Street Life,” the artist focused on a demon coming out of a battle as if a genie. The demon holds a heart in his hand, which has turned black. According to the artist, this represents the way people change once they participate in street life. The painting refers to money, cars, women and violence.

The artist also has a piece he named “Evolve Create.” Harrison takes viewers into his world of creativity by sharing the significance of this particular piece.

The content of this piece allows him to reflect on the way he wanted to reshape his life, as the drawing illustrates the very dimension of evolving. Two faces, one human and the other extraterrestrial, represent a higher intelligence, based on the evolution of thought and the way humans reshape their lives.

Harrison’s art merges various components and shows self-discovery in not only the hands of creativity but also in the minds of illumination.

Finally, the artist has a work inspired by a National Geographic picture of a boy from the Peruvian Amazon. The work shows Machu Pichu indigenous persons. The artist decided to incorporate Mayans in this piece. The idea of the boy came from the cover of the magazine.

“I wanted to challenge myself just to see if I could draw it,” said Harrison. “I encourage new artists to respect the art and stay committed.”



Limitless Creation:

What Jorge Sees, Jorge Can Recreate

Gifted by nature, Jorge Hernandez, 65, is a brilliant artist with his utensils at hand. He can practically sketch anything.

“To me there are no limitations as to what I can create,” Hernandez said. “I have created portraits of famous people, greeting cards, mountains sceneries, animals, oceans and anything that people [ask] me to sketch.”

The Mexican native has been drawing since he was arrested 17 years ago. He taught himself by emulating other incarcerated artists’ ideas. Hernandez says he decided to learn to draw as a means of surviving inside prison. Without any family members or friends to help him financially, he needed to find a way to afford basic hygiene items like soap, shampoo, and toothpaste.

His art has been his bread and butter for nearly two decades.

His greeting cards display the beauty of nature, like a brown cardinal standing on top of a white flower. He says the hardest piece that he has ever worked on is the scenery of a forest. To recreate nature in its wildest component was a challenged for the artist. He recalls how this was his first time exploring nature at its best

As time went by, he got

better and came up with his own styles, bringing his pieces alive.

The artist did a portrait of the famous artist Taylor Swift at the request of another incarcerated person. He took the challenge and tested his skills.

He also produced a piece of a mother with a veil covering her head, holding her child next to a blank scroll along a humming bird flying next to some green thorns. The artist has created a comic poster of Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Super girl, and Green Lantern. He says the piece represents how these super humans came together to defend the world from all then evil or from any extra-terrestrial invasion against humanity. He also made a piece depicting Nemo and Dory beginning their journey into the deep blue sea.

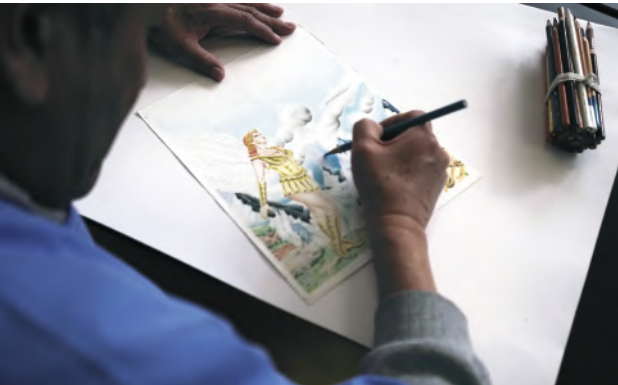
Hernandez says he has no preference when it comes to the style his friends or customers may request of his sketches.

“When my art is received by the family member of those I made it for, they send words of appreciation,” Hernández said. “To know that my art put a smile in the hearts of someone else out there makes me happy.”

Reflecting on his rehabilitation, Hernandez shared



Hernandez's self-taught artistic skills have become a way to provide for himself while locked within these walls. What began as a hustle, has bloomed into a passion.



that the time he spends in his art has helped him deal with stress and escape the emotions of anger and loneliness. He encourages those who are new to sketching not to give up on their art, especially if it is being made for their loved one. Allow your heart to take over, he said.

“If there is someone else in prison that may be just draw-

ing as a means to earn a couple of soups, do it as if you were making the drawing for your own family,” Hernandez said.

Upon release, Hernandez will be deported back to Mexico and anticipates moving to the coast, where he can continue to draw and sell his art to tourists or anyone who might be interested in his art.

—Edwin E. Chavez

