

# San Quentin News

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## Creativity and diversity showcased in talent show

By Jerry Maleek Gearin  
Journalism Guild Chair

Professional singer, songwriter, and producer Jason “Poo Bear” Boyd has worked with Usher, Drake, and Mariah Carey, and recently he visited a correctional facility to showcase talent behind bars.

Boyd collaborated with the California Model Team at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center to set a platform that allows incarcerated men to display their skills.

“I believe an event like this is important, because it gives the incarcerated a platform of creativity in a safe place; it will bring them a sense of hope,” said Kaleo “9yne-40E” Kealoha Schreinea, an event performer.

The event took place on the facility’s Lower Yard with a variety of music and culture such as: Rap, R&B, Native American, Reggae, and faith-based messages.

At the previous day’s auditions Boyd stated that he has aspirations to make the event a traditional thing. The songwriter added that he would keep coming back as long as the prison’s administration lets him.

SQ resident Alonzo “Bruzzin” opened up the event, telling the audience he wanted to help them release a little anger with his words.

“Get the hell out of my way, and stay from in front of my face,” he rapped.

Resident Jamal Harris hosted the event; he thanked every one for showing up.

Harris introduced Mesro “The Human Sun” Coles-El, who performed spoken word.

See POO on pg 4



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews  
Jason "Poo Bear" Boyd



Photos by SQ Video Department

Incarcerated fathers out front of Chapel prior to daughters arrival

## Communication workshop ends with Parenting Prom

By Michael Callahan  
Staff Writer

“Families can be one of the most powerful drivers of healing and safer communities,” resident Louis Sâle said. “No event has been more humanistic than giving dads the opportunities to dance with their daughters. I missed my daughter’s prom due to my incarceration.”

For the first time in San Quentin, 16 incarcerated fathers danced, played games, and spent the day with their daughters inside the prison walls.

The historic step highlighted a different perspective of what a prison experience could be for incarcerated individuals who are disciplinary free and involved in self-help programming.

Incarcerated fathers attended an eight-week, peer-to-peer-led family communications workshop put together by resident Tam Nguyen that culminated in a “Parenting Prom.” Throughout the workshop, families strengthened their communication skills with active listening exercises.

Discussions centered on expectations, resentments, forgiveness, and emotional

awareness. Difficult conversations were about mental health, substance and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and coping skills.

“I learned how to sharpen my communication skills with my kids and how to not put unreasonable expectations on them. I found by asking open-ended questions it allowed my daughter and I to open up more naturally,” resident Troy Varnado said.

Varnado has been incarcerated 18 years and said he felt blessed to have the opportunity to dance and spend intentional time with his daughter. He said he never got to go to proms, graduations, or a father-daughter dance. “So many people stepped up to show they care about us and our family. When you do the right thing others can see we [incarcerated] are redeemable, we can and have changed.”

“I am looking forward to growing our relationship,” Brianna Varnado, daughter of Troy, said. “His personal growth and his ability to heal from his traumas are impressive.”

Resident Wayne Lefon Briggs said it was just in the last two years that he and his daughter started talking. He committed his crime and went to prison when she was one. “I



Michael Navarro with daughter



Steve Warren with his daughter

See CONNECT on pgs 6-7

## 14 years after Realignment of prison population

By Kevin D. Sawyer  
Editor-in-Chief

In the fall of 2011, the term “Realignment” was added to the wordlist of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. That was when the department began transferring hundreds of prisoners to San Quentin State Prison by bus. For months, the “grey goose” could be seen pulling into the prison’s receiving and release gate, three to four loads each day.

Tim Young, George Coles-El, and Kamsan Suon were among the 2011 new arrivals. They still reside at the prison-turned rehabilitation center. Together, these men have served more than 80 years behind bars. Today, they barely recognize other Realignment transferees.

“At San Quentin, there’s been a lot of changes

since I’ve been here,” said Young. “I’ve been through all of it.” Young arrived at San Quentin from Soledad Central on November 28, 2011. He has been incarcerated more than 36 years. When he transferred to San Quentin it was still what he called a “regular prison.”

“I still remember there was no power in West Block,” said Coles-El. “There was no hot water. There was nothing in there. They had us showering in the gym.” Incarcerated 19 years, he arrived at San Quentin on November 29, 2011, from Soledad Central.

Suon arrived at San Quentin on November 14, 2011, from Folsom State Prison. He has been incarcerated for 26-plus years, and said he takes programs to better himself. “I don’t like the fact that they’re dumping people [here] who don’t want to program. They (CDCR) need to vet out some of these guys.”

“I’m watching this building go up—I have high hopes it’s going to work,” Suon said about the rehabilitation center under construction. “I see the governor investing in us. At the same time, they (CDCR) need to cut the population. There’s too many people, and there’s too many problems.”

Fourteen years ago the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court order for California to reduce its prison population to 137.5% of design capacity. The decision affirmed a federal three-judge panel’s order from two years earlier. The state Legislature responded with Assembly Bill 109, formally known as the 2011 Public Safety Realignment Act, more frequently referred to as “Realignment.”

When Young, Coles-El, and Suon arrived at San Quentin, South Block was a reception center, “the Hole” (Administrative

Segregation), Sensitive Needs Yard reception, and overflow for East Block (Death Row).

In the general population, there were no SNY prisoners, Youth Offender Program, Enhanced Outpatient Program (mental health), transgenders, or hearing impaired inmates.

In 2018, there was a massive shift in the institution’s mission, which transformed San Quentin to a non-designated programming facility, so anyone could program there.

“I think [Realignment] was a good idea on paper, but the real implementation of it failed,” said Coles-El. “I’ve seen the lockdowns kind of stop. Some days we would wake up to lockdowns.”

“People like to see change,” said Young. In regard to the demolition of San Quentin’s

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HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

Incarcerated Mothers  
leave lasting impression

— STORY ON PAGE 2

CANINE COMPANIONS

Second annual graduation  
recognizes six puppies

— STORIES ON PAGE 4

YOUTH OFFENDER DIALOGUE

San Francisco DA's discuss  
juvenile -to-prison pipeline

— STORY ON PAGE 5



COACH RECEIVES KIDNEY

Steve Reichardt found  
hope and inspiration in  
coaching baseball

— STORY ON PAGE 9





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Happy Mother's Day from SQNews

Residents' mothers' redeem and restore relationships with sons

By Jerry Maleek Gearin  
Journalism Guild Chair

In an expression of gratitude, two San Quentin residents explain how their mothers' time in prison impacted their lives, including a renewed love through a mother's transformation.

An adolescent child that has a parent behind bars can experience: "psychological stress, antisocial behavior, and criminal activity," according to *The Sentencing Project*.

SQ resident Anthony Gomez, 28, has spent 10-years in prison. He said that, between the ages of three and four his mother was incarcerated for 16 months at California Institute for Women in Chino, California.

"Although my mom was incarcerated, she learned a lot from being in prison, Gomez said. "She did everything she could [once released] to make amends and take us away from the toxic and impoverished environment."

He reflected that, while his mother served her sentence, she hardly ever got visits, and mail was few and far in between. In prison, his mother felt ostracized because their family was not supportive of his mother's choices.

Gomez added that, his mother's incarceration not only affected him, but his four brothers because at a young age they were separated.

In the absence of his mother, Gomez and three of his brothers went to live with their biological father, who was a drug addict. They were exposed to crack pipes on the floor of the home, and his father's drug addicted friends coming in and out of the house.

His oldest brother was nine-years-old at the time, and was forced to take care of him and his three brothers.

When Gomez's mother got out of prison, his mother went to school and became a medical assistant. She later developed a career in the medical field.

His mother and his stepfather went above and beyond making amends. They sent Gomez and his brothers to a



Sammie Nichols with his mother in SQ visiting

good school; they had a nice home, and lived a good life.

"I think the majority of our moms are our biggest supporters. This is especially true for me because my mom knows exactly what I am going through now," Gomez said.

He reflected that, his mother's efforts continue to go above and beyond, sending him pictures, and visiting him frequently.

Gomez shared how his mother read a lot while she was incarcerated. As a result, they share the same sentiment for books, and during visits, they talk about what they have read.

Sammie Nichols, 34, a San Quentin resident who has been incarcerated for 16 years said between the ages of 9 and 18, his mother was incarcerated off and on for 10-years at California Correctional Women's Facility in Chowchilla, Calif.

"My mother's incarceration affected my relationships with women. I had to always have another woman as a backup plan," Nichols said.



Anthony Gomez with his mother

His mother's incarceration affected him growing up; which made him untrustworthy of love and affection. "The feeling that a loved one can be taken out of your life so quickly, and there is nothing I could have done," Nichols said.

He also reflected that while society taught him to mask the pain that occurred during his struggles, his mother reminded him of the importance of expressing his hurt in order to come to a better understanding.

In the midst of his upbringing, his mother was always a survivalist, teaching him how to survive throughout life's shortcomings. To this day Nichols remains in contact with his mother, sharing that, she has been out of prison for the last 12 years.

"Thank you for being my ride or die, no matter what, you always had my back, you loved me enough to be honest, and tell me when I messed up," Nichols said. "Everyday is like Mothers' Day for a woman like you."

Expectant mothers' life behind bars

Journey from addiction in prison to advocating for mothers behind bars

Tabatha Trammel persevered through teenage pregnancy while struggling with drug addiction and incarceration. Now, she finds purpose in advocating for expecting mothers behind bars.

When Trammel became pregnant at age 15, her family's religious beliefs led them to disown her. She also lost the support of friends in the process, according to *The Marshall Project*.

After her second pregnancy, Trammel ended up in an Atlanta City jail for selling drugs to feed her addiction. She told a jail official that she had just given birth and was still bleeding. Instead of receiving medical care, Trammel had to use torn bed sheets in order to cope.

"I cried and slept all day. I didn't even want to deal with the reality of getting up and taking a shower," Trammel said. "I was suffering postpartum [post birth] depression, I had been on drugs, and I was locked in a room all day."

Since her incarceration, Trammel has been clean and sober for 14 years. She shifted her focus to her own mental health. She founded Woman with a Plan, an organization designed to connect pregnant girls and women with resources as they reenter society, stated the article.

Trammel goes into the State of Georgia's women's prisons and jails, understanding that she has to gain the women's trust. To do so, she uses her own personal story as a testament to relate to them, according to the article.

"I am here to support you as a person," Trammel tells the women. "To make sure you are doing alright, and you are being treated right."

Trammel is a certified doula, which is



a companion who works with pregnant women in need of emotional and physical support.

She said that expecting incarcerated women do not have a voice, and Trammel wants to be that voice. Her efforts are to support these women through pregnancy and childbirth. In addition, she supports those who want to give up their newborns.

As part of the program, a doula nurtures incarcerated women during pregnancy. A companion develops healthy relationships with the women,

supporting the women's outlook as they are separated from their newborns. Doulas aspire to keep the women connected with their babies after birth, according to the Ostara Initiative.

This connection is pivotal to the wellbeing and healthy development of the newborn— data has shown lower Caesarean section rates and lower preterm delivery rates when companions accompany expecting mothers. The women are encouraged to take part in a nutritious diet, such as fruits, vegetables, proteins, calcium, iron, and Omega-3s.

Trammel believes that jails and prisons are a safer place for some pregnant women, compared to being on the streets and struggling with substance abuse. Jail may be the only place where the women can actually afford and receive medical care, according to *The Marshall Project*.

After their children's birth, the mothers only have two days to bond with their babies. While the mothers are dealing with separation anxiety, Trammel shows them a different way to cope.

If a jail authority allows it, the women can cuddle or sleep with a blanket that has their babies' scent on it, as a way to bond.

"When I look back, my experience being in and out of jail while pregnant chipped away at my inner core," Trammel said. "It was hard on my spirit. I try to remind women that this is just a situation—it is not their destination in life."

—Jerry Maleek Gearin  
Journalism Guild Chair



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EDITORIAL

Announcement of American Penal Press Contest coincides with World Press Freedom Day

By Kevin D. Sawyer  
Editor-in-Chief

This month, World Press Freedom Day acknowledges and celebrates journalists from all walks of life. This is the time to support journalists too often singled out for vengeance because they exercise their right of press freedom. Many have been killed on their quest to uncover truth.

Equally important, too often, journalists behind bars are disregarded. World Press Freedom Day allows us to show up in the public arena. As reporters considered working behind enemy lines, we are the unsung purveyors of fact — disappeared in the era of mass incarceration. That is changing, though, especially as the United Nations recognizes and reminds governments of their need to respect press freedom.

After 35 years, the American Penal Press Contest has returned. The idea to revive the contest is an outgrowth of what has happened at *San Quentin News*. The non-profit Pollen Initiative (formerly Friends of San Quentin News) in conjunction with Southern Illinois University Carbondale has resurrected the contest.

The American Penal Press Contest, coupled with World Press Freedom Day, is a time to acknowledge the hard work done by all professional journalists who are incarcerated, and supported by prison officials nationwide.

Journalism at San Quentin, and in other correctional institutions, would not be possible without the aid and support from the dozens of professional journalists, editors, photographers, design and layout experts, outside business advisors, volunteers, college students, and generous grant funders. Over the years, all have unselfishly given their time and resources to men and women considered undeserving.

During the contest’s first iteration, it was considered the “Pulitzer Prize behind bars.” It was established in 1965 by SIU’s School of Journalism. A national awards competition, it “celebrated excellence in incarcerated journalism,” according to the Pollen-SIU press release. “Intended to honor the journalistic efforts of incarcerated writers, the national competition showcased the public new

kinds of prison coverage.”

We journalists, who are imprisoned, report from inside dwellings designed to sequester individuals and to withhold truth from power — and The People. It can be a risky undertaking to be a journalist inside a correctional facility in which stories and people are regulated by officials in a position to abuse their authority.

Some of our contemporaries — journalists on the outside — do not recognize us as “real reporters.” Many of them write about incarceration and carceral settings, yet they have never been inside a jail or prison, much less have they interviewed a person detained by the state. We incarcerated journalists do it every day.

For its work, *San Quentin News* won the American Penal Press Award for the Best Prison Newspaper in 1966, ’67, ’72 and ’81. In 1968, it also won the Charles C. Clayton award, named after the man who reportedly was the first person to teach journalism inside a prison.

By the 1970s, the American Penal Press Contest was at its height and fame. Each year, it received more than a thousand submissions from incarcerated journalists. The contest ended in 1991 as tough-on-crime edicts and mass incarceration became normalized civil rights tragedies.

Added to the problem of journalists’ imprisonment, I want to call attention to those who say “We’re not real reporters.” This is not to shame them, but to educate them and other journalismaward organizations that acknowledge “real reporters” while bypassing us. If they choose to not know us, how can they possibly learn about us and our stories?

Lackadaisical and lazy reporting is sometimes willful, and it occurs on many levels. Take the many news reports about San Quentin in which “real” journalists still refer to it as a “maximum security” prison. Really? San Quentin has not been a high-security prison for more than 40 years, even when Death Row was still here.

Here is another example. Recently, I read a *Courthouse News Service* story. It showed a photo of prisoners at San Quentin, dressed in orange suits with “CDCR Prisoner” printed on the back of their shirts. The photo caption read,

“General population inmates walk in line at San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, Calif.”

General population inmates at San Quentin do not wear orange suits. That is attire for prisoners who were new arrivals at the prison’s reception center, which closed several years ago. That is why President Donald Trump has branded some stories “fake news.”

We journalists who are incarcerated are literally boots-on-the-ground, beat-walking reporters. We know the landscape because we are imbedded. In the last two decades we have made a comeback, too. We had to, because few people were telling our stories, and we were dying as a consequence.

Let me put that last statement in a different context and digress for a moment. In terms of reporting, prisoners have devised nuanced ways to dispatch information from prison. Under the First Amendment, we have the unique ability to report about issues having come to the fore through prison grievance processes. Exhaustion of this remedy is a requirement to file for legal action. In this way, the *Plata* and *Armstrong* cases began, which eventually tackled prison overcrowding in California.

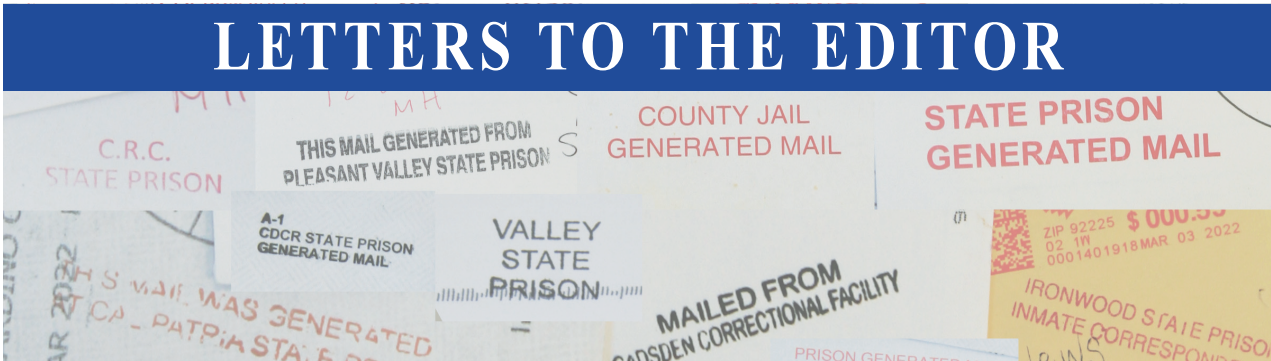
News is disseminated with words and through World Press Freedom. Now, with the return of the American Penal Press Contest, incarcerated journalists will once again receive their much deserved recognition.

Because of a growing number of prison publications around the country, many supported by Pollen Initiative, an organization with deep roots inside *San Quentin News*, many “real” journalists and writers have emerged.

Journalists who are incarcerated have something exciting to which they can look forward later this year, thanks to the commitment of the penal press. Three years ago, I quoted a *San Quentin News* editor who wrote:

“[I]f the prisoner is not championed by his own people, just who the hell can he expect to do anything for him? And how else, except through the prison paper, is his side to be brought forward?” — *San Quentin News*, circa 1942.

I live and write by that quotation because freedom is still found through the press — on both sides of the prison gate.



Smiles from North Kern

Dear SQNews:  
Again, I opened the SQNews and while laying it out on my rack, I found myself with a ear to ear smile :-)! You folks keep blowing my mind with your ability to capture the ‘here and now’ with your skillful reporting! I picked this one up at the law library as I did the last one I got. So, I wanted to ask if there is any way I could receive a subscription from you. I share every issue I acquire with everyone around me. So if possible, please put me on ‘the list’!

—Daniel Larsen  
North Kern State Prison  
Delano, CA

Seeking connection during segregation

Dear SQNews:  
I am here in Texas fighting a life sentence. I am in Ad-seg and in need of reading and resources. Here they have stopped all incoming mail other than business or legal. Everything else is done through

an electronic mail service. We don’t get the smell of the mail or the feeling that our hands are touching the same paper as our loved ones. We don’t get to go to our property and pull out a letter when we are feeling blue. I am interested in SQNews. Thank You.

—Lawrence Smith  
Taylor County Jail  
Abilene, TX

New Mural by resident artist at SATF-Corcoran

Dear SQNews:  
I would like to see if you can publish in your newspaper photos of murals we have painted here at CSATF “G Yard” in Corcoran. The Building 2 mural shows the Sierra Nevada, Yosemite, Fairground Rodeo, Pismo Beach, Bakersfield College, and Fresno. The Building 3 mural has Sea World, Hollywood, and Six Flags. We get copies of your newspaper in our library here. Thank You, from a loyal reader of SQNews.

—Jon Paille  
California SATF-Corcoran  
Corcoran, CA

How can we expand earned living units throughout California

Dear SQNews:  
SQNews is always eagerly anticipated here. It is the only prison paper I’ve seen that I literally read from cover to cover. There is no earned living unit here, no honor dorm for us to aspire to or to develop for our rehabilitation. This is an important issue for us. What can we do?

—Christine Reynolds  
California Institution for Women  
Corona, CA

Getting through rough times in New York

Dear SQNews:  
Hello, happy holidays... You guys are awesome. I mean, I have 20 years to do, and I wish I could do it right there at San Quentin. New York doesn’t offer us anything close to what you all got going on over there. Anyhow, any chance I get to

support my brothers and buy your newspaper I must take. So here goes some stamps for another issue. I can’t wait to get my copy. Stay safe, and calm, cool, and collected.

—Jason Markovitz  
Mid-State Correctional Facility  
Marcy, NY

SQNews applauded for reporting on positivity

Dear SQNews:  
I am reaching out for information on the Earned Living Unit (ELU), including placement criteria and benefits and programs available to ELU residents. The SQNews is exceptionally informative and highlights the positive activities of the prison residents. I applaud you for your dedication and commitment for the publication of the newspaper read by many within and in the community. Thank You.

—Manuel Torres  
R.J. Donovan  
Correctional Facility  
San Diego, CA



POO

Continued from page 1

Residents display musical talent on Lower Yard



Protestant Chapel Choir

“My thoughts wander the page like nomads, my rage might lead to an early toe-tag. When I turn up, solar get so mad. I disregard consequences and things go bad,” Coles-El said.

The next performer introduced was Miguel “Yoz” Munoz-Huerta, who said he wanted to take responsibility for his past actions.

“I usually make music from my own perspective. This [song] came from a woman’s [perspective]. This is accountability for the way I treated women in the past,” he said.

The host introduced crooner Amos Carter, who sang a rendition of Bill Withers’ “Lean on Me.” The attendees sang along with Carter, which showed that it was a crowd favorite.

“Lean on me, when you’re not strong,” Carter sang. “Just call on me brother when you need a hand, we all need somebody to lean on.”

SQ resident Alexander “Poetic Injustice” Parloto’s rap song “Cover it up” brought attention to distinguishing the truth from a lie.

“It’s never good when you cover things up. We got to face the truth, [because] the ugly truth is better than a beautiful lie,” Parloto said.

Situe “Skooee” Toluao graced the stage with a reggae song called “Jah’s [God] Plan.”

“You got to be able to tell a truth from a lie, look into your heart and you’ll see Jah’s plan,” Toluao said.

Jackson “Supreme” Jackson told the audience that he is not an entertainer, he is a teacher. The crowd cheered his spoken word as he confronted the use of the N-word, bringing awareness and social consciousness about the derogatory language.

Resident rapper Jarvis Garner stated that his rap messages entail positivity.

“I am a conscious guru; everything I say is always conscious,” he said. “I try not to use negative words. I like to approach my craft with non-negative words.”

SQ’s CMT officers Lopez and Kruse caught everyone off guard when they escorted resident Lawrence “Chosen” Randall to the stage, telling him “You’re going to perform or go to the hole.” A joke, of course, but it set up Randall’s performance as he expressed his faith.

“I am about to wake their game up, I salute all those who did not change up,” Randall rapped. “I give the glory to God, he’s the one that gets me through.”

Next was Native American resident Maxx Robinson representing his heritage with vocals and beating a spiritual drum.

“Can’t you see how I rock my feathers to the sky? I got the heart of a warrior, look in my eyes, and my spirit can’t be broken ‘cause [I] stand strong as long as I have sacred



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews  
Maxx Robinson

ground to stand on,” Robinson said.

Grabriel Moctezuma was introduced to perform his song titled “Moth.” He said that it came from a dream of traveling and meeting his future wife. He knew in the dream when he met her he would know.

“A moth to your flame, pull me closer now,” Moctezuma sang. “I dreamt of your face before we spoke out loud, though I can’t say where we’ll go or how, ‘til my dying day hold my soul.”

SQ resident Mike Adams and the Protestant Chapel’s choir brought a song of praise to the attendees titled “Call Him Up.”

“This is real-time church,” Adams said. “In a place where so many are trying to connect, our faith tells us that we can call on Jesus, and be one in praise even when times are hard.”

Gerry Muratalla, who is known for Gerry and La Banda Esperanza (the Band of Hope), performed a solo titled “Forgiveness.”

“I am very grateful because I have [a] life, I have an opportunity to share my personal story about forgiveness, about my brother who passed [away],” Muratalla said.

All the attendees identified with each genre of performances. They danced, rapped along with performers, and rocked to the messages of hope, truth, and spirituality.

SHIFT

Continued from page 1

Conflicting views on CDCR's direction toward rehabilitation

Building 38, to make room for a state-of-the-art education facility, he said “That’s a big change. Watching the construction allows me to imagine the potential change San Quentin has as a rehabilitation center—from a prison.”

Upon reflection, Young spoke of the changes that had momentous and deadly consequences that overcrowding introduced at San Quentin, such as the 2015 Legionnaires outbreak. Later, chicken pox, H1N1 Bird Flu, and Norovirus outbreaks interrupted programs.

Then, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic swept through the prison, killing 28 prisoners and one correctional sergeant. “Those are the major [changes] I can remember,” said Young.

“I’ve lost count of the population changes,” said Coles-El. “It’s been so many turnovers. I think—because of Realignment.” Most noticeable, he said, “This generation here, these guys are crazy. They have no respect, no boundaries, and when you call ‘em on it they’re mad about it.”

Like others, Coles-El pushed on. “I got my AA in 2017,” he said, adding he still attends college. “I haven’t missed a semester since January 2012.”

Since Realignment, four wardens have watched over the institution: Kevin R. Chappell, Ron Davis, Ron Broomfield, and today, Chance Andes.

Young’s 35-plus-years journey through the CDCR to San Quentin started in California State Prison Tehachapi, California State Prison Sacramento (New Folsom), Folsom State Prison (Old Folsom), California State Prison Calipatria, and Soledad Central.

“San Quentin is like no other prison I’ve been to,” said Young who earned his AA there, and completed The Last Mile’s audio engineering program. “It’s like a community now, with more programs.”

Realignment was said to be “a historic reform.” Those who arrived at San Quentin in 2011 witnessed the on-site Patten University change to Mt.

Tamalpais College; growth of The Last Mile; expansion of San Quentin News to all CDCR prisons; creation of the prison’s Media Center; forums with public officials like district attorneys and more—all precursors to the California Model.

“The goal [of Realignment] was to cut costs, reduce recidivism, and, above all, address inhumane and unconstitutional state prison overcrowding, which was claiming the lives of one imprisoned person every week,” the Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice reported.

The May 2011 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, and the October 1, 2011 Assembly Bill 109, signed by then-Governor Jerry Brown “put the state on the path toward compliance with the court order,” Stanford Criminal Justice Center (Stanford Law School) reported.

“One of the things I’ve seen change is there have been more medical alarms than anything else,” said Coles-El. “I attribute that to the older population and terminal conditions. I know a lot of people have cancer, heart conditions, and they’ve had strokes.”

Governor Gavin Newsom’s plan for a rehabilitation center is underway. Outside media, the public, unions, politicians, and officers weigh in—for and against the governor. None of them live at San Quentin, but even its residents sometimes have conflicting opinions.

“Honestly, I think it’s (Rehabilitation) just abolishing the prison in name only,” said Coles-El. “They’re trying to take the name ‘prison’ off prison and call it something else. They still lock us up every night, at 9 o’clock.”

From Realignment to Rehabilitation, Young, Coles-El, and Suon have lived through all the changes at San Quentin. What the future holds for the institution is anyone’s guess—conflicted or not.

“I never thought I would see people playing video games in prison, especially with [custody] staff,” said Coles-El.

EVENTS

Canine Companions held second graduation for six puppies

Tofu, Scarlett, Templeton, Margaret, Sherman, and Pippa show off their training for attendees



“San Quentin is great for everyone all around because the training here can change someone’s life.”

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter  
Staff Writer

At a March 28 graduation in San Quentin’s Chapel B, the graduates had names like Tofu, Scarlett, Templeton, Margaret, Sherman, and Pippa. As they ascended the stage to the music of Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March, they exhibited confidence and dignity, signifying their educational accomplishment. They also walked on four legs.

Canine Companions held its second graduation for San Quentin’s puppy-raising program and many accolades had come to San Quentin Rehabilitation Center because of the program. Most importantly, San Quentin residents volunteering their time as dog handlers succeeded in training six matriculating dogs that progressed to professional training.

“This is a most beautiful day for us,” said Paige Mazzoni, the CEO of Canine Companions. “What you do for us changes our trajectory. Because of San Quentin, we added 13 more prison programs. We have therapy dogs coming now. Thank you for your effort. We are so grateful to you.”

San Quentin also received the Gold Award for the number of hours volunteered, the highest number ever, said Mazzoni.

San Quentin’s incarcerated dog handlers remarked that they found exciting to see the progress of their work because the event featured three generations of puppies — it included Wendel and Artemis, the two alumni from last year’s graduation, and the puppies in training since then. The graduation also included the recently arrived puppies.

“He is amazing and so helpful to me,” said Benjamin Carter about his dog, Artemis III. The wheelchair-bound Portland, Oregon, veterinarian added,

“I lost a lot of my independence when I became disabled and he restores it. My dog went through training here at San Quentin and they did an unbelievably great job. My dog is a great companion; he is supporting and loving. He even helps me in the laundry, by pulling the laundry basket and he fills the washing machine for me.”

Another client who identified himself only as Robert took the stage with 2024 graduate Wendel. Born deaf, Robert said having his companion dog had made a huge difference for him. From the stage, Robert said, “Thank you for changing my life,” and to the *San Quentin News* Robert later said, “Wendel makes me comfortable and he is always there when I need him. I can depend on him.”

James Dern, Canine Companions national director of puppy programs, said puppies raised at San Quentin have a 10% greater success rate at advancing to service dogs. He attributed the enhanced success to the unique skills of San Quentin’s incarcerated handlers.

San Quentin resident Chase Benoit said that on July 4, the nonprofit Canine Companions, based in Santa Rosa, Calif., would celebrate its 50th anniversary. Benoit said he has busily logged hours toward his certification as dog trainer. He and Jared Hansen, another incarcerated handler at San Quentin, would advance to trainers upon release, Benoit said.

“San Quentin is great for everyone all around because the training here can change someone’s life,” said Canine Companions trainer Nicole Tate.

The results of San Quentin’s puppy program have resonated far beyond the rehabilitation center’s walls. For veterinarian Carter, Artemis’s owner, the program has made a difference every day so far: “Artemis opens doors, literally and figuratively,” he said.



REFORM

Youth offenders sit with SFDA to discuss juvenile-to-prison pipeline

By Bostyon Johnson  
Managing Editor

Members of the Youth Offender Program at San Quentin met with San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins and other members of her office to discuss preventive measures dealing with the juvenile to prison pipeline.

“Only thing I can remember is thinking how much I want my momma,” said Jarvis Gardner Jr., who at 14-years-old sat in an interrogation room and took a deal for 55-years-to-life with two strikes.

Following in the tradition of *San Quentin News*-style symposiums, residents named their victim(s), sentence length, and commitment offense during introductions.

The vulnerability of the incarcerated people allowed outside guests to hear the accountability directly from the offender, but also the extreme bias of sentencing laws handed down to juveniles who sometimes spend large chunks of their lives behind bars in both juvenile and adult prison facilities.

San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins said the goal of their March 18 visit



San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins and her office with PIO Lt. G. Berry and resident youth offender mentors and mentees

Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

was to discuss some of the challenges with resentencing and ways to cut off the pipeline that leads juveniles to adult prisons.

“It is not always easy to say that you will sit in the room with the district attorneys, but I always leave with ideas to fix the broken [legal] system,” Jenkins said.

*SQNews*’s Vincent E. O’Bannon hosted the forum and held a moment of silence

for victims all around the world before attendees divided into six small groups of three outside guests and seven residents.

As resident Gardner Jr. talked about his childhood, he said one thing that would have deterred him from crime would have been protection and guidance.

“The one thing that sticks out for me during that time is loneliness,” said Gardner Jr. “I’m

here to help someone who may possibly find themselves in my situation at age 13 or 14 years old.”

Resident Diego Nava discussed his experience with incarceration and said that his first run-in with the law resulted in an ankle monitor and house arrest.

“There should have been more pressure placed on my parents; something might have changed,” said Nava. “Even if they would not have

told the truth about what was happening [at home], but it would have pressured them to put more pressure on me.”

Attorney Stacie Pettigrew said that her perspective changed after she prosecuted several murder cases.

“In most of my cases, you reach a point where you believe that, based on the conduct, [a person] should be in prison,” said Pettigrew. “One of the things I strive for

is seeing people as people and not just another case.”

Austin Hogan is a member of the Youth Offender Program. He said he has always wanted to help people, but after everyone who really cares about him left, he decided that it was time to change. He said he would like district attorneys to know that rehabilitation is real.

“My priorities are realigned because this isn’t my life and I’m not a prisoner,” Hogan said. “We’re going to have good minutes and bad hours, good days and bad weeks, but have the courage to make the right choice for yourself.”

District Attorney Jenkins noted the benefit of talking with the incarcerated people. She said there is always going to be something good that comes from these discussions, like the two proposed bills: single cell occupancy and paying off restitution. Those were the result of talking with incarcerated residents in the Civic Engagement Group at San Quentin.

“Because we are in charge of the sentencing, we can fix the time people are given,” Jenkins said. “We have to start off small, but hopefully the bills get passed.”

Former life-without-parole prisoner advocates policy change

By Vincent E. O’Bannon  
Staff Writer

A former LWOP (life without parole) prisoner is aiding a coalition seeking to end life sentences in California.

Joseph Bell, a San Francisco native, was supposed to die in prison. Bell, who was sentenced to life without parole spent 22 years in prison for a crime he was involved in at the age of 26.

His prospects for release from prison came in 2018 by the narrowly passed legislative measure SB 1437, introduced by former state Sen. Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley.

The senate bill allowed for felony murder charges only for those who either committed or planned a killing or took part in the crime, and who acted with “reckless indifference to human life,” the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported.

After having his LWOP sentence commuted, Bell now works with the advocacy group Human Rights Watch as a case manager. An “unusual group of officials came to his aid,” reported the *Chronicle*. That aid appeared in the form of former Gov. Jerry Brown and the former district attorney of San Francisco, Chesa Boudin.

“Mr. Bell committed a serious and violent crime,” said former Gov. Brown in the article. “But it is clear that he has distinguished himself by his concerted efforts toward rehabilitation in prison, including and creating a program to deter at-risk youth from entering prison.”

Bell’s murder conviction of LWOP was commuted to 25 years to life, which made him immediately eligible for parole. Bell was released in 2018.

“You’re scheduled to die in prison,” said Bell. “It leaves you hopeless. Sometimes I wished I had the death penalty [because] life without parole is like a slow death.”

“I believe people that put in the work [self-help and self-awareness] deserve a second chance if they take the right

steps to better themselves,” said San Quentin Resident Carlos Meza. “Giving someone a life without parole sentence, especially if they were in their 20s when they committed their crime, seems to me to be an injustice to everyone involved.”

“I understand the impact that crime has on victims, and I sympathize with them,” added Meza, “But in that same vein, society shouldn’t condemn the victimizer without first understanding the ‘why’ leading them to committing their crime.”

Bell said getting to the point of rehabilitation did not start until he began maturing.

“I didn’t start maturing until I was 40. I just started getting older and doing a lot of self-care, self-work, and taking cognitive behavior classes,” Bell reflected.

According to the article, Bell began taking his self-awareness work seriously after more than a decade in prison.

“I did a lot of reckless stuff when I first got to prison, until I had something to live for,” said Bell.

Bell, who organized Education, Diversion, and Goals to Endeavor while in prison, was found to have taken part in the robbery, but not the actual killing of the victim of that crime.

Former state Senator Nancy Skinner weighed in on the rehabilitative progress inside and outside of the California prison system by the formerly incarcerated.

“[I’m] impressed with how many folks I’ve met or learned about who were released and are working with community organizations providing rehabilitation and support for formerly incarcerated people,” said Skinner.

Not long after his recall as district attorney, Boudin invited Bell to speak to students at UC Berkeley, where he founded the Criminal Law & Justice Center.

“I take responsibility for my part... I have gratitude for the breaks I got,” said Bell.



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

New rehabilitation center construction progresses quickly

Kevin D. Sawyer  
Editor-in-Chief

The reality of San Quentin officially becoming a rehabilitation center has been unfolding before the eyes of prisoners, staff, volunteers, and visitors at the 173-year-old institution.

On some mornings, Robert Tyler stands outside a trailer where The Last Mile is temporarily situated. It’s where he works as teaching assistant in TLM’s coding program. He watches free men at work, constructing the new Scandinavian-style rehabilitation center. It is where the now demolished Building 38, his former job site, once stood.

“I love watching the construction take place,” said

Tyler. Soon, he and others will return to the place where TLM’s coding and audio-video production courses were birthed.

Concrete poured, cranes lifting, scaffolds raised, and the sounds of a construction site will soon come to an end on San Quentin’s Lower Yard.

At different stages in the new building’s development, people have walked past a chain link fence, cloaked with a green tarp. They have witnessed another form of rehabilitation in the making.

Recently the walls of the new building’s brick façade went up, with prefabricated windows in full view, facing the Lower Yard. Construction is scheduled to finish in January 2026, according to CDCR officials.

Nonprofit funds sports for children of incarcerated parents

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter  
Staff Writer

Would the inclusion of athletics influence identity, academics, and social skills of youth with an incarcerated parent?

Khalid Cannon, who grew up in Alabama and had lost his father to prison at age four, would answer that question in the affirmative. His extended family of grandparents, uncles, and aunts had not wanted him to suffer as a failure in the shadow of an incarcerated parent, so they filled the gap of an absent father with sports — lots of sports.

“I had lots of family with a great support system and they got me through that difficult time,” said Cannon, “I had a football family, I had a baseball family, and I had a basketball family; they kept me focused. Eventually, all my sports took me to playing football for Yale.”

Cannon visited the *San Quentin News* newsroom to talk about Put Me In, a nonprofit he co-founded. He started Put Me In with the goal of institutionalizing the sports program his multi-disciplinary sports families had given him. Put Me In would accomplish its mission by awarding children with an incarcerated parent \$1,000 annually to pay for sports-related expenses.

Cannon, a Berkeley College graduate at Yale, class of 2017, played left tackle for which his towering 6’6” eminently qualified him. He graduated with a double major in chemistry and geology. After Yale, Cannon worked as a geologist for a mining company. He then switched to Core BTS, a consultancy.

The nonprofit’s co-founder, San Franciscan and fellow Yale graduate, Matt Blodgett, of Pearson College, class of 2000, had the same background and wanted to give back, too. Together with

Bostonian Robin Glaser, the trio started the nonprofit in the summer of 2020.

“Because we started out right in the middle of Covid, we did not award the first cohort until the summer of 2021,” Cannon said. Put Me In has reached its early goal of serving over 100 recipients.

“What’s cool about us is that we stay with the kids for the long run and we have them participate for the long run,” said Cannon. “Older kids can use our accelerators; they got that full autonomy to figure out where to come out successful.”

Cannon said the nonprofit would provide financial aid of \$1,000 to each enrollee, starting as young as first grade and recurring annually through high school. Meant to cover the cost of sports, the funds would assist system-impacted families by helping them with expenses related to sports, such as travel, equipment and participation fees.

“We get kids who could not afford anything and we have had nothing but success. The kids now have positive role models and we see improved self-esteem and self-confidence,” said Cannon.

The organization has also made a point in showing loyalty to its award recipients.

“Once caregivers leave jail or prison, we do not kick out the kids,” said Cannon. “We stay with them until they graduate high school. We do ask for report cards to make sure that they keep playing sports.” Put Me In also engaged in tracking recipients’ sports statistics.

Cannon said Put Me In aid did not only go to players. “We give financial aid to cheerleaders, too. We also have ballet dancers.”

“What started as a program to help kids ended up helping whole families. The kids just do not feel so alone,” said Cannon.





Top left: Daughters arrive inside prison.

Right: Father's await in suits.

Below right: Acting Chief Deputy Warden Patao assists Wayne Briggs with suit and tie.

Left: Wayne Briggs with his daughter



Left: Kelon Williams says bye to his daughter.

Below left: Benny Espinoza dances with his daughter

Lower right: Harold Meeks with his daughter on the red carpet



Above: Peniamina Taamal watches his two daughter play foosball

Top Right: Sergio Alvarez dances Tik Tok challenge with his daughter

Right: Michael Navarro poses with his daughter in ring camera

Left: Recently paroled Tommy Hall with his daughter



Above: Correctional Officer Romero with Father's and The People in Blue

Below: Steve Embrey with his wife and daughters

Left: Carrington Russell reads his letter to his daughter



Above: Arthur Lewis dances Tik Tok challenge with his daughter

Below: Derell Davis dances with his daughter



Left: Vincent E. O'Bannon dances Tik Tok challenge with his daughter

Bottom left: Louis Sâle dances Tik Tok challenge with his daughter

Below: Troy Varnado dances Tik Tok challenge with his daughter

# SQ's first-ever Parenting Prom

**CONNECT**  
Continued from page 1

*Resident fathers and their daughters enjoy dancing, games, connection*

give all the glory to God. This is a blessing."

After 11 years of incarceration, Briggs said he felt guilt about coming to prison. He said he did not want to push his daughter away, so he was passive instead of being the father she needed. He said the program showed him how to bring up a conversation about uncomfortable situations.

"This process allowed my daughter and I to get in deeper conversations. Some truth, some tough, and some good. It has been healthy for us," resident Sergio Alvarez said of the communication workshop. He said his daughter is 24 years old and he has not had any physical contact with her since she was 12.

Resident Steven Warren said communication is a big factor in raising children. He said prior to the workshop he did not know there were three different communication

styles, which include passive, aggressive, and assertive.

"As fathers we are the protectors, providers, and we are our children's example of how to navigate circumstances. It is my job to communicate better with them. It is about listening, not to just respond, but confirm what I heard," Warren said. "This will be a lasting memory for the rest of our lives. Praise God and thank the most high."

Resident Michael Navarro said, "I learned to listen to what my daughter is actually saying." His 11-year-old daughter spent the day playing corn-hole, video games, and foosball with her father for the first time in a decade. "Before, I was communicating passively because I was in prison and I wanted to make up for me not being there. Now I communicate more effectively in an assertive way."

Nguyen said resident Tony

Tafoya came up with the idea for a Parenting Prom" in 2023 when he attended the Makahiki, a native Hawaiian ceremony where he witnessed the bond Louis Sâle had with his kids. Then the film *Daughters* played at the San Quentin Film Festival in October and highlighted how an event like this could happen in prison.

Tafoya said he worked with prom committee members Henok Raphael, Arthur Jackson, Nguyen, Sâle, an outside support team, Public Information Officer Lt. G. Berry, and correctional officer Romero for over a year leading up to April 5.

"This is the California Model, what we are doing today. Everything we do is to promote public safety. We prepare guys to reenter society, help them to socialize, to learn how to handle disappointments, and how to treat people like people," said

Lt. Berry.

"Our goal was for this event to be healing for the families. A woman's self worth is not built up in them and a positive male role model can help them to be strong and independent," Tafoya said.

Throughout the event the fathers and daughters had a hula dance lesson, competed in a Tik Tok dance challenge, played a "Finish the Lyric" game, and spent intentional time where the fathers read a letter out loud to their daughters.

Daughter Autumn O'Bannon said she appreciated the intentional time spent with her father, Vincent. She said that despite knowing how her father felt about her, it felt good to have the letter read aloud. "I appreciate him as much as he appreciates me."

Several supporters helped coordinate and finance the event: The Last Mile, God Behind Bars, Got Light,

Hensley Entertainment, Angel Cakes, Joe's Taco Lounge, Kirk Achme Florist, and CDCR. Also supportive were resident committee members of The People In Blue and Wallbusters, a gaming group in San Quentin.

Monies raised to cover expenses for the daughters' dresses, their hair and makeup, and their travel and hotel arrangements. The fathers wore tuxedos and received fresh haircuts from the resident barbers the day prior. Corsages and boutonnières ornamented the outfits worn by the participants.

"To see how hard everybody worked to make it happen in support of families, to be in contact, get in contact, and stay in contact was heartfelt," outside coordinator Courtney Rein said.

"We have made big strides never been done before. To push rehabilitation gives incarcerated individuals

hope and opportunities," acting Chief Deputy Patao said. "These guys earned this through good behavior. The daughters deserve this. This is a humane way to help incarnated individuals on their journey and change the stereotype and view of corrections."

Resident Benny Alonso Espinoza said he was nervous, but looked forward to building an experience with his now seven-year-old stepdaughter. "My daughter is my baby. She is one of my higher powers." He said she is no longer an actual baby, but she has her own characteristics.

Espinoza has been incarcerated since his daughter was born. "This experience gives my baby the opportunity to see me in a different light. I am grateful for this opportunity. It will be a forecast of what it can be like when I get home," Espinoza said.





# Immigrante erróneamente exiliado entre la polémica y política

Por Edwin E. Chavez  
Spanish Journalism  
Guild Chair

El mandatario de EE.UU., usó una antigua ley de 1798. La Ley contra Enemigos Extranjeros, como excusa para deportar a cientos de inmigrantes Venezolanos y Salvadoreños a la Mega prisión llamada Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (Cecot) en El Salvador, Conocida como El Hoyo Negro.

Entre éstos deportados se encuentra Kilmar Ábrego García, quien fue directamente deportado y encarcelado en esta prisión.

De acuerdo al reporte de

*BBC-American Latina*, el cinco de abril- los deportados fueron identificados como terroristas por ser supuestos miembros de la banda criminal Venezolana Tren de Aragua y con 23 supuestos miembros de la pandilla Mara Salvatrucha (MS13); hasta el momento la Casa Blanca no se ha pronunciado al respecto, a pesar de dichas deportaciones sin aportar pruebas de vinculación criminal.

ICE está usando como herramienta principal para la detención, el arresto y deportación de inmigrantes, por el solo hecho de tener tatuajes, haciendo de ellos un objetivo. Resultando en

este mandato, un crimen el haberse tatuado, y ahora son fichados como criminales, cuando la realidad es que, son personas sin ningún récord criminal en el sistema .

García, a temprana edad salió huyendo de su país debido a la violencia de las pandillas. En ese entonces (2006) miembros de éstas organizaciones lo habían atacado y amenazado de muerte, una táctica común para extorsionar a los padres de familia. Debido a éstas circunstancias, la Corte de Migración le habían otorgado una “protección contra la deportación”, en este país.

Un alto funcionario de

EE.UU. reconoció que la deportación del Salvadoreño se trató de “un error administrativo”, ante un tribunal federal en Maryland.

El pasado cinco de abril, *BBC* anunció que la jueza Paula Xinis ordenó que García debía ser regresado a los EE.UU., a más tardar el siete del mismo mes. Sin embargo, la administración de Trump apeló esta decisión a la Corte Suprema de los EE.UU., argumentado que esa orden excede tanto el poder de la jueza como el del gobierno de EE.UU., pues García se encuentra ahora bajo la custodia del gobierno Salvadoreño. La Corte Suprema ordenó que se suspendiera la orden judicial de regresar a García.

“Estamos sobre la marcha, enfrentado de nuevo un momento en la historia donde la tiranía racial es imperdonable, y la gente de buena conciencia se encuentran en una lucha que terminara tan rápido como empezó, si no es reconocido por lo que es”, comentó Kelton Oconnor residente de SQ.

Abner Oliveros otro residente de SQ, salió de su país natal Guatemala. Buscando protección con su hijo de 14 años después que su esposa falleciera en un accidente.

“Yo entré a los EE.UU., por asilo político con mi hijo. Debido a las amenazas [de] mis cuñados por la reciente

muerte de mi esposa”, dijo Olivero. Las personas que no han cometido ningún delito, no deberían de estar encerradas, especialmente en países extranjeros. El presidente de EE.UU. debería honrar el procedimiento legal de este país, antes que deporten a la gente.

Acorde a lo a lo escrito por la cadena *BBC América Latina*, los familiares de estas personas reclaman que sus seres queridos no están afiliados en grupos criminales, además de cuestionar los lineamientos legales del gobierno de EE.UU. para acusar a dichas persona sin pruebas suficientes.

## Cambia tu mente crea nuevos resultados



Los exponentes Natalia Varela y Juan Carlos Rubín

Por César Martínez  
Staff Writer

Los alumnos del Dr. Joe Dispenza y la Fundación Dar para Dar “Give to Give”, ofrecieron el primer taller informativo en español, para la comunidad hispana del Centro de Rehabilitación de San Quentin.

El Dr. Dispenza, basada la neurociencia en su investigación — explica cómo las persona adquieren el conocimiento de su personalidad y cómo crea una realidad, establecido por: experiencias, actitudes, comportamientos, pensamientos, sentimientos, hábitos y decisiones.

Los exponentes del evento fueron los Consultores de Soluciones en Neurocambio; Natalia Varela y Juan Carlos Rubín, este último viajó desde San Luis Obispo México, para proporcionar el programa a los residentes de SQ.

“Si ustedes cambian, ustedes pueden ser la persona que cambie la historia en su familia”, dijo Rubín.

El taller impartido durante tres días, proporcionó a los reos una nueva conciencia reestructurada. Basada en herramientas y ejercicios, en donde los participantes pudieron comprender los conceptos de; no ser influidos por el entorno, la razón del estado de supervivencia (conocido como estrés), identificación de emociones, la función de los tres cerebros y el estado creativo o de sobrevivencia del cerebro.

Uno de los enfoques que resaltó en el taller fue: cómo la personalidad crea una realidad basada en pensar, elegir, actuar, experimentar y sentir. El objetivo es que los participantes entiendan que todo lo dicho anteriormente, los llevo a la consecuencia en donde están el día de hoy. Sin embargo todo esto puede



Los residentes de SQ tomando apuntes de los temas del taller

cambiar, con el “cambio de pensamientos” y por consecuencia crear “una nueva realidad”.

La fundación provee este taller a empleados de grades compañías como: Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Pfizer, Sony, Target, entre otros; con un costo monetario entre los \$700 a \$1000 por participante. Desde el año pasado, la fundación ha trabajado para que la información de éste taller sea proporcionada a los hispanos de SQ.

“Cuando aprendes en tu lengua natal, lo aprendes a largo plazo y lo entiendes mejor”, agregó Rubín, dando datos de que una persona tiene entre 60,000 a 70,000 pensamientos por día y que el 90% estos pensamientos son similares.

Según el Diccionario Webster, define la neurociencia como: la rama que estudia la ciencia que trata la anatomía, psicología, bioquímica o

biología molecular de los nervios y tejidos nerviosos especialmente con su relación de comportamiento y aprendizaje.

Durante los tres días del taller, los consultores mostraron videos en donde los residentes aprendieron sobre los componentes del cerebro, además de explicaciones de cómo se crean las conexiones neuronales durante los momentos de aprendizaje y cómo este aprendizaje y su repetición, ayuda a tomar una nueva experiencia y mediante su repetición una y otra vez, condicionan al cuerpo tanto neurológicamente como químicamente para memorizar acciones de una manera consciente, dando como resultado un nuevo habito o habilidad.

“Podemos cambiar en momentos de dolor y sufrimiento o en tiempos de inspiración y alegría”, dijo el Dr. Dispenza.

## Las mujeres que abrieron nuevos caminos

A lo largo de la historia varias mujeres se han destacado por su lucha de superación de género, abriendo caminos de esperanza a las nuevas generaciones.

Basado en varias biografía, cada una de estas personas desafiaron el estigma en su época, que las mujeres no podían alcanzar un nivel educativo o profesional.

“La mujer no tenía muchos derechos, era cosa de que ella tenía que atender las cosas del hogar y siempre era el hombre quien tenía la última palabra sobre las decisiones en lo que a la familia y el hogar se refería”, dijo José de Guadalupe Benítez, un reo del Centro de Rehabilitación de San Quentin.

De acuerdo a *Wikipedia*, hubo varias mujeres que tomaron la decisión de hacer una diferencia en la historia, postulándose en puestos considerados solo para hombres. En este artículo se nombra a algunas, quienes forjaron el camino a favor del género femenino.

-La historia de Victoria Claflin Woodhull, inició cuando decidió mandar una carta al editor del *Heraldo de Nueva York*, para publicar su aspiración al puesto presidencial en las elecciones del 2 de abril de 1872 y ser la primera candidata a la presidencia.

Durante su nominación hubo varias controversias, empezando por los historiadores que comentaron que de acuerdo a la Constitución, ella era muy joven para postularse como presidenta.

Los partidos políticos de EE.UU., han jugado un papel importante en la historia, cuando nominan a mujeres de su propio partido para manejar al país, donde hasta el día de hoy sólo lo han dirigido hombres, pero que gracias a éstas nominaciones se sigue abriendo paso para futuras posibilidades.

-Margaret Chase Smith, en 1964 fue la primera mujer nominada al puesto de presidenta por parte del Partido Republicano, recibiendo votos de New Hampshire, Illinois, Massachusetts, Texas, Oregón, entre otros estados.

-El Partido Demócrata en 1972, Shirley Anita Chisholm fue la primera mujer Afroamericana en buscar la nominación para dirigir a los EE.UU., recibiendo 15,195 votos delegados en la Convención Nacional Demócrata.

De acuerdo a los archivos públicos de California y

" La mujer no tenía muchos derechos, era cosa de que ella tenía que atender las cosas del hogar y siempre era el hombre quien tenía la última palabra sobre las decisiones en lo que a la familia y el hogar se refería "

otros estados de la nación, también hubo mujeres que tomaron esa misma decisión de participar en puestos públicos.

-Tal como lo hizo Elizabeth Hughes, quien fue la primera mujer elegida para ocupar un cargo público en California. Además de que Hughes, fuera de las primeras cuatro mujeres elegidas para ocupar un puesto Legislativo, en el estado más grande al oeste del país en el año 1918.

-Rose Anna Vuich de descendencia Serbia-Americana, quien representó a los californianos siendo la primer mujer en ocupar un puesto en el Senado de California, es un ejemplo más de cómo las mujeres han vencido los obstáculos femeninos a través de la historia. Basado en los archivos de *Wikipedia*

La historia indica que la mujer no solo ha ocupado puestos importantes o han luchado por la igualdad, Buscando nuevos horizontes levantando sus metas al cielo y más allá.

-En los registros indica que en la ciudad de Guayaquil, Ecuador, la física, poeta y activista Matilde Hidalgo Navarro de Procel, fue la primera Latino-Americana en ejercer su derecho a votar. Hidalgo también fue la primera en recibir un Doctorado en Medicina.

-Sally Ride, fue la primera mujer Americana en viajar al espacio.

-Pearl I. Young trabajaba como técnica en la Administración Nacional de Aeronáutica y del Espacio, por sus siglas en Ingles NASA. De acuerdo a los registros públicos.

La historia ha demostrado de cómo las mujeres también aprendieron a ser independientes y buscar distintas maneras de contribución a la sociedad, de pasar a ser amas de casa a ocupar puestos públicos y privados de suma importancia.

“La mujer es finalmente reconocida por su contribución a la sociedad en el mundo”, dijo Alina Stanciu maestra de educación básica de SQ.

—Por César Martínez  
Staff Writer

## Estadísticas de mujeres encarceladas en EEUU

La población femenina encarcelada, esta casi siete veces más alto en comparación al año 1980. Ya que, entre los años 1980 y 2022, el número de mujeres encarceladas aumento más del 585%, aumentando de un total de 26,326 reas en 1980, a 180,684 reas en 2022.

En los últimos 40 años, en EE.UU., ha habido un profundo cambio en el desarrollo de las mujeres dentro del sistema legal criminal. Este el resultado de los esfuerzos al cumplimiento de las leyes, siendo más rígidas contra las drogas, barreras para la reinserción a la sociedad que afecta únicamente a las mujeres post-delincuente. De acuerdo al reporte de *The Sentencing Project*.

Según las estadísticas en 2022, de acuerdo al Sistema de Correccional de EE.UU., han mostrado una cifra alrededor de 975,000 mujeres bajo el sistema criminal; de las cuales 87,784 se encuentran en prisiones (estatales/federales), 92,000 más se encuentran en cárceles pertenecientes a

los condados, otras 717,811 se encuentran bajo libertad en aprobación (probation) y por último 76,870 más se encuentran bajo libertad de “parole”.

Aunque hay mucho más hombres en las prisiones que las mujeres, el porcentaje del crecimiento de éstas ha sido dos veces más alto de lo que es para los hombres desde 1980.

Un dato más, que se muestra en las estadísticas desde el año 2000 al 2022, es que ha habido un decremento de mujeres encarceladas, distinguidas por raza y etnia. Las mujeres de tez morena conservaban una población de 205% por 100,000 personas en el año 2000 y en el año 2022 esa población encarcelada bajó a un 64% por 100,000 p., teniendo así un decremento poblacional del 69% en 22 años. Las mujeres de etnia Latina, tenían un 60% por 100,000 p. en el año 2000 y en el año 2022 la población se redujo a un 49% por 100,000 p., dando un decremento total del 18% en 22 años.

A diferencia de las mujeres

Americanas de tez blanca, que contaban con un 34% por 100,000 p. en el año 2000, aumentaron su población del 34% a 40% por 100,000 p. teniendo un incremento total del 18% más en 22 años, indico el reporte de *The Sentence Project*

Los datos estadísticos destacan que entre 1980-2022, se ha comprobado que hay muchos hijos en las comunidades sin sus madres y son criados por parientes.

Residentes del Centro de Rehabilitación de San Quentin, reconocen que muchas de éstas mujeres encarceladas son madres.

“La madres encarceladas, siguen siendo madres. No importa a que prisión lleguen”, dijo Willie Sherman. “Yo siento que todos los días, debe ser el Día las Madres. Sin una mujer, el hombre no estaría en el mundo”.

Juan Carlos Rubín, un voluntario de la organización de Dar para Dar “Give to Give”, cree que la madres encarceladas tienen un amor incondicional a sus hijos. Y por tanto, deben de perdonarse

ellas misma y luego pedir perdón a sus hijos.

Otro residente de SQ, Luis Orozco compartió que “los prisioneros deberíamos ponernos en los mismos zapatos de las mujeres encarceladas, ellas también son seres humanos que han cometido los mismos errores que los hombres encarcelados”.

“Las personas encarcelas, le[s] está haciendo falta [...] lo que es más importante para ellas, así como yo, estoy lejos de mis hijos”, dijo Natalia Varela durante una visita a San Quentin. “Sepan que los seres humanos nos podemos equivocar, pero que, realmente aprendemos de nuestros errores para llegar a ser más poderosas, inspiradoras, empoderadas y capaces de volvernors con mucha humildad. Y que todos merecemos una segunda oportunidad cuando somos capaces de reconocer y aprender.”

—Por Edwin E. Chavez  
Spanish Journalism  
Guild Chair  
—Escritor Contribuyente  
Miguel Angel Hernández



SPORTS

SQ Giants' coach long wait for kidney is over

By Anthony Manuel  
Carvalho  
Sports Editor

As Shohei Otani and the World Champion Los Angeles Dodgers opened the major league season in Japan, the SQRC Giants celebrated a new beginning for their biggest supporter.

Steve Reichardt, the SQ Giants' lead outside coach, was born with polycystic kidney disease, which slowly degrades the functions of the kidneys. He said that prison baseball helped him maintain his health and sanity as he waited on the donor list for a new kidney until finally receiving the new kidney in February of this year.

Reichardt likened his wait time on the list to a rookie looking for his first at bat in the "biggs."

"In 2022 my kidney malfunctioned down to 6% efficiency," said the Giant's co-lead volunteer alongside Mike Kremer. "It wasn't the wait that was excruciating, it was the false acceptances that gnawed on me."

Reichardt's declining health made him eligible for the national transplant list.

But when he was closer than he had ever been to the finish line, his original donor caught COVID three weeks before the scheduled transplant.

"That made me an emotional roller-coaster, now I deal with depressive disorders and have become a huge advocate about the importance of mental health," Reichardt said.

Reichardt was also offered a kidney by ex-SQ Giant pitcher, Jeffrey "Dewey" Dumont.

"Just think—this man, while an incarcerated resident, went through the required protocol to verify he was a match; and because



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews  
Steve Reichardt

of CDCR regulations he was not allowed to donate his healthy kidney to me," said Reichardt. "For the others who are not as lucky as me, I sure wish that part of the law could change. Here was this man, with no hidden agenda, offering to give me a kidney while incarcerated; that was a miracle I'll never forget," said a teary Reichardt.

Reichardt, a native of Soma, who moved to San Francisco, spoke about his life in the Bay Area and about his passion for the game of baseball and for the SQ Giants.

"I'm a dedicated career man who split time between work and the game I loved," said Reichardt. His passion for baseball started as he grew up in little leagues and baseball organizations. He joined the California Maritime Academy at age 18, where he earned a BS in Marine Engineering.

During his career, Reichardt became a licensed third assistant engineer for the commercial shipping industry before becoming a stationary engineer. Afterward, he traveled the world through the commercial shipping industry, pulling up in ports in Asia, Australia, and South America.

"My training ship was the steamship, the *Golden*

*Bear*," said Reichardt.

After his worldly travels, Reichardt came home to the Bay Area where he was able to rekindle his love of baseball. He played competitive fast pitch at Albert Park in San Rafael, slow pitch in Sonoma until 2002, and then at Redwood Empire's men's adult baseball league in 2005, where he first heard about the SQRC baseball team.

"Some of our opponents spoke of the SQ baseball team and I decided to take a trip to SQRC with a team called The Willing," said Reichardt.

Reichardt caught the prison baseball bug and quickly decided to bring his own team called the Titans in for four consecutive years.

"I played against the SQ baseball team from '09-'14 and was approached to coach the SQ A's in '13 with the hopes of getting better competition," Reichardt said.

Reichardt took to the Field of Dreams like a fish takes to water and has not left his coaching position since 2015.

Reichardt says prison baseball has been "a very large part of my support group that saved my life."

He reminisced about the 2019 SQ A's, who put together a 33-game winning streak and finished the season at 38-2.

"I firmly believed our team and coaching staff could have competed at the lower-to-mid levels of the minor leagues, and, or, at the college level," said Reichardt.

Reichardt praised 2019 center fielder Austin Thurman, who was released in 2020 before playing in the Pecos Independent League with the Roswell Invaders. Thurman left baseball to raise a family and is now driving coast-to-coast in big rigs while living in Texas.

He reflected on the dedication of the baseball

organization that participated in the 2020/21 COVID "game-less season."

"Imagine being out there every day after the pandemic, practicing, just hoping a team can come in. No one does but our players missed nary a day of practice," said Reichardt. "[Manager] Coach Will and the entire coaching staff and team should have been recognized for their sheer dedication and grit just for practicing without any games!"

Reichardt helped the SQRC baseball organization, now called the SQ Giants, become internationally known. He considers his best achievement to be improving the fellowship and notoriety of the SQ baseball program, which included helping secure the SF Giants as the teams' new sponsor and his recruitment of Brian Nichol's team, called the LA LOVE, as his highest profile moments.

"Hearing Casey Affleck give SQ baseball a shout out on ESPN's *Sunday Night Baseball* during the Yanks-Sox game was great," said Reichardt.

After Reichardt recovers from his life-saving procedure, he will not lessen his commitment to the team's rehabilitation. In fact, he hopes to expand the season to 50 games a year.

"In five years, I'd like to see SQ Baseball have five Brown Card holders with teams from Canada, South America, and across the U.S. come in, playing to extend the visibility of SQ baseball," said Reichardt. "I hope the California Model will reach back to the roots of SQ's oldest program—baseball—and allow outside visitors to come in to see the greatest incarcerated baseball team in the country."

SQRC faces synthetic turf danger in Lower Yard upgrade

By Terrell J. Marshall  
Journalism Guild Writer

If San Quentin decides to install synthetic turf this year in place of the old geese-poop-filled grass, the fiscal saving in water usage may not outweigh the long-term physical effects on the future residents.

Many public health advocates claim artificial turf has high contents of polyfluoroalkyls, substances that can cause serious health risks to athletes, according to an article by Tom Perkins in *The Guardian*.

PFAs, also known as "forever chemicals," can be absorbed through skin, inhaled, ingested, or get in wounds. One small study involving six-year-old soccer players and their coach found "artificial turf presents a health threat," according to Kyla Bennett, a co-author of the nonprofit Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility study.

Bennett went on to say, "In 2024, the last thing we should be doing is putting down acres of a plastic fossil fuel product ... with chemicals that are going to get all over athletes' skin, and into soil and water. It just boggles my mind that people are still considering using this stuff."

Perkins explains that PFAs, a class of 15,000 chemicals, can be used to make products that resist water, stains, and heat. Many of these chemicals are connected to cancer, liver problems, kidney disease, birth defects, and other serious issues.

In certain studies, athletes' skin was swabbed before play and after; an increase in the most dangerous of the PFAs was found in three out of four players. In one player, it was doubled. According to Perkins, it has been found that some synthetic turf uses ground-up tires in its creation that contain heavy metals, benzene, and other carcinogens.

According to an *ABC News* story written by Leah Sarnoff, "forever chemicals" used in artificial turf pose serious dangers and exist in these types of products.

Sarnoff's article also discussed the plastic faux field issue with PEER's Dr. Kyla Bennett, who told Sarnoff, "Think about the wisdom of putting down acres of plastic in the year 2024 ... and then allowing athletes to go play on that for hours a week. To me, it doesn't pass the straight-face test."

For over 50 years many variations of synthetic turf have expanded to

thousands of recreational and professional-level fields throughout the nation, replacing natural real grass.

One champion of this field, Melanie Taylor, president of the Synthetic Turf Council, told *ABC News*, "The synthetic turf industry is proud to deliver quality products that make a positive difference and are used by thousands of communities nationwide." The council claims there are 12,000 to 13,000 artificial turf fields in the nation, adding 1,200 to 1,500 new installations each year.

Another synthetic turf manufacturer, Tough Turtle Turf, told *ABC News* that it "just makes sense" for multi-use sports fields that are used year-round. Tough Turtles design specialist Peter Wierzba explains, "With natural grass, you get spotty fields, you get a lot of divots, you get a lot of gopher issues ... and those can be very, very harmful for injuries, ankles, knees, and things of that sort."

Wierzba also said, "Synthetic turf reduces the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and gas and oil from lawn equipment."

While representing her advocacy group, Bennett said, "There's no doubt in my mind that the dangers of artificial turf outweigh any potential benefits."

It appears that athletes at San Quentin are debating about the potential pitfalls of synthetic turf.

Resident A. Sangabriel, 48, used to play on the SQ Earthquakes soccer team before injuring his knee on the only dirt field available at the prison. "Even though I tripped over a pothole, I'd still rather play on grass instead of artificial turf," said Sangabriel.

He said the good thing about playing on turf is that the ball moves faster because the ground is harder. However, Sangabriel also stated that when you slide-tackle or fall, the synthetic turf causes bad rug burns and hurts more than natural grass.

Second baseman J. Uhler, who plays for the SQ "Hard Timers" softball team, added, "The smell of fresh-cut grass is part of playing baseball. The little league fields I grew up playing on all had real grass and the outfielders always had to be careful not to trip over the sprinklers."

Uhler said playing ball at The Q is risky because of the potential tripping hazards and welcomed any improvement to the current condition of the field, whether it is synthetic or natural turf.

SQ's Hardtimers open season with win

By Marcus Casillas  
Journalism Guild Writer

San Quentin's Hardtimers opened up their 2025 season with a game against Prison Sports Ministries that renewed the gratitude and warm embraces between the teams who returned to SQ's Field of Dreams.

PSM's Doug Aubineau, a formerly incarcerated coach for the SQ A's and head coach for the Hardtimers before his release in 2021, said "There are people that care out in society and are willing to help if the time and effort is put forth by the incarcerated. I want them to know they can make it if

they do what's right."

The game showed the time and effort of the SQ players as they tied in a competitive classic that included the following highlights:

PSM scored the season's first run before then Hardtimers' Aaron Zendejas hammered an inside-the-park homerun to take the lead 3-1, which was followed by Hardtimers' Noah Villazon hitting a second inside-the-park homerun in the bottom of the fourth to highlight what appeared to be an onslaught of the visiting team.

PSM mounted a comeback as the visitors' Jeff Ratcliff homered to give the visitors

the lead 12-10, before the Hardtimers' Al Crews hit a bomb to center field to take back the lead 17-12 in the bottom of the 5th.

"I challenged myself to try something new, it's my first time playing softball," said Crews. "I wanted to be part of this team; working together with other positive attitudes helps build character through discipline and accountability."

The game was back and forth through the 8th inning before the Hardtimers Nate Venegas hit a drive out to right field that brought the final runner in resulting in a 21-21 tie.

PSM's Ron Araguz said,

"Through this camaraderie we build, we get to see a sense of normalcy in here."

Hardtimers manager Rick Dias spoke on his teams' outlook for the upcoming year.

"I'm having a positive feeling about this season; we just need to stay injury free. It's a new team with a new message," said Dias.

After the game, the teams gathered and PSM's Paul Britton left players with a question about spirituality. "What do we do with that faith?" asked Britton. "Faith is easy when everything is going great; I have to trust that his plan is better than mine."

Two big hitters prepare baseball field for upcoming season

Canseco & McGwire, Mays & McCovey, Montana & Rice: it seems great duos rise above the call of duty. At San Quentin Rehabilitation Center's Field of Dreams, fans of the oldest active diamond in the country can find two curators who double back as important components of the SQ Giants' pitching staff.

Patrick Poteat, 36, and Robert Nash, 41, groomed the baseball diamond with the precision of professional "greenscapers" who took care of legacy fields such as Oracle Park or Fenway Park.

"All the memories and regrets of my poor choices and bad decisions, re-playing

day-after-day," said Nash. "Wishing to create new memories with loved ones, memories you hold on to; memories to be proud of; and baseball adds to those memories."

The ballplayers maintained the field as their daily activity and excelled as teammates with passion and sense of humor.

"Maintaining the field is my therapy," said Poteat. "I take pride in it and it shows how much work we put in. I feel proud when I get out there to play because I want to play on a decent field."

"I don't track the amount time I put in, because it's the only time I feel like I'm

not in prison," said Nash. "The walls, the fences, the barbed wire, the towers, they all just disappear ... for those few hours. It's not really something I know how to put into words, it's just something you can only understand by experiencing it, and that is something I am so incredibly grateful for."

The duo spent up to 20-hours per week mowing the grass — the grass since turned to dirt and dust — watering the field, trenching it before heavy rains, manicuring the base paths, and chalking the field.

After field maintenance, they threw batting practice or hit infield to help Coach

Richard "Will" Williams of the SQ Giants and Coach Rick Dias of the SQ Hardtimers.

Poteat's and Nash's hard work on the field demonstrated a work ethic that allowed them to make the team.

Nash said, "What's a guy like me, a guy that never even played baseball, going to bring? To my surprise and everyone else's too, I made it and was officially part of the team."

"[I] tried out a few times before making the team but my life was fast and loose then," said Poteat.

They made the roster the same year, and decided to show their appreciation by

taking up the responsibility of maintaining The Field of Dreams.

"We want to help our team be successful. Whether we contribute a lot or a little does not make a difference, as long our contribution helps," said Poteat.

They have become fixtures on the field and have learned to take on counseling qualities.

"Sometimes it brings me down when I see or hear others' problems, as trying to help them gets in my head, but I combat that stress as me and Nash work on the field together," said Poteat.

"I've learned how to be part of a community," said Nash.

"Making positive impacts where people count on me, has let me eliminate my self-centered thinking; knowing that we're part of something bigger than ourselves."

They also make practical jokes, filling player's pockets with cut grass or chalk and doing unspeakable jokes with protective cups.

"My biggest insight is that I'm not the most important person in my world," said Nash. "My actions don't just have consequences, but they used to cause great harm and cause trauma to people I care about — never again."

—Anthony Manuel  
Carvalho  
Sports Editor



# Film festival set to return in Fall '25

Kevin D. Sawyer  
Editor-in-Chief

The second San Quentin Film Festival is officially scheduled to return to San Quentin Rehabilitation Center later this year on October 23 and 24.

This fall, for two days, film-industry insiders will once again converge on the 173-year-old San Quentin to connect with incarcerated filmmakers, a repeat performance of last year's historic first-ever film festival held inside a U.S. penal institution.

"We just received the official approval a few weeks ago," said Cori Thomas, co-founder and co-director of SQFF25. "We expect outside media to attend again, and exciting industry guests."

When asked, why do this again? Thomas said, "The original reason I had this idea was to one, allow the outside industry, of which I am a part, the opportunity to see the excellent work I was privy to see; and two, open the doors to allow a pipeline to work on the outside."

For the better part of two decades, prisoners at San Quentin have produced news, radio, podcast, and video content in its media center. In recent years, filmmaking has taken place. The SQFF's debut is a result of that work.

"The film industry has long focused on crime and incarceration as subject matters, without using people with lived experience to tell their own stories," Thomas said. "In addition to preventing recidivism, [the SQFF] gives incarcerated artists the opportunity to practice their art."

There will be several changes at SQFF25. A new category, for longer films, is open for anyone to submit, according to Thomas. She said originally the category was only opened to filmmakers who had never been incarcerated.

"What was interesting was the huge number of films submitted in this category," said Thomas. "[It] highlighted the fact that most films about incarceration are made by people who have never been incarcerated."

Thomas said because of the success of SQFF24, "We are seeing people who might have hidden the fact of their incarceration—perhaps out of fear of never getting work in the industry—now stepping forward and excited about this festival." She said this allows stories to be told in a more authentic, realistic way,

which makes communities safer in the long run.

"The stereotypical tropes that come from uninformed storytelling end up being very harmful," said Thomas. "We aim to change that narrative by allowing the world to see incarcerated and formerly incarcerated storytellers in a new light."

Two years ago, Pollen Initiative, the nonprofit that supports programs in San Quentin's media center, brought in members of SF Film Society. They have been coming in on their own to host filmmaking workshops for the incarcerated, some of whom were already skilled in writing and filmmaking, before prison.

Among other changes, SQFF25 has extended the screenwriting and documentary pitch competitions to other prisons on the path to opening media centers to their populations.

"We wish we could extend the invitation to all prisons, but we don't have the capacity this year," said Thomas. "As we add more staff, we hope to extend the opportunities to all prisons."

The San Quentin Film Festival has also added new programs to its roster. Throughout the year, SQFF Presents holds workshops, put on by highly distinguished people in the industry, and screening of films with panel discussions.

On February 24, Greg Kwedar and Clint Bentley, director and writer of the Oscar-nominated film "Sing Sing," and acclaimed cinematographer Amy Vincent provided instruction to the incarcerated men at San Quentin, where they learned to work on a real film set using Kodak-loaned cameras and film.

In March, Paul Rogers (Academy Award-winning editor of the film "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once") came to provide valuable editing tips to the San Quentin media center filmmakers. He gave them some advice on how to edit the short film shot on Feb. 24. "This was an inspiring and illuminating discussion on editing," said Thomas

"Last year, a lot of stories mentioned the fact that state lunches were provided to the guests [at SQFF24]," said Thomas. "This year we will be providing some outside food, but there may be some state food available for those who wish to partake."

"Within 18 months of returning home, formerly incarcerated filmmakers are invited to submit proposals

for projects they wish to work on, which can include film equipment they want to purchase, and classes they wish to attend," said Thomas. "A committee of peers and industry professionals choose four to receive a grant to help them with their goal, along with mentorship."

The outside SQFF team will consist of the same players from last year's film festival. They are as follows: Rahsaan Thomas, co-founder and co-director, will run the festival with Cori Thomas (no relation). Katherine Moore is the SQFF event producer and publicist. William Baker is SQFF's technical coordinator.

"Former Capt. Samuel Robinson is an integral part of our team," said Cori Thomas. "He coordinates with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and advises us on the logistics of rules and regulations."

Robinson was San Quentin's public information officer for more than a decade. He was instrumental in paving the way for the institution's media center, by saying "yes" and green lighting the establishment of audio, video, and print productions.

Brian (Asey) Gonsoulin—who paroled from San Quentin in 2024—is also an event producer.

The incarcerated inside producers are Harold Meeks and this writer, Kevin D. Sawyer. Josh Joaquin is the logo designer and web artist on the inside team.

"We could not do this without Little Giant Lighting stepping forward to help this event look as good as it did," said Cori Thomas, adding, "I have asked Greater Good [incarcerated musicians] to greet us with their gorgeous world music again, in addition to other entertainment."

The success of SQFF has an abundance of support, including from Pollen Initiative which provides expert volunteer support and funding for programs in San Quentin's media center.

Thomas said she is excited the virtual film festival is also returning to allow those unable to attend the opportunity to see all of the films online.

Submission dates are from May 1 to July 31, 2025.

More information is available at the SQFF25 website. Films can be submitted through Film Freeway, which can be accessed at [www.sanquentinfilmfestival.com](http://www.sanquentinfilmfestival.com). Email: [info@sanquentinfilmfestival.com](mailto:info@sanquentinfilmfestival.com).



## Self-help and mentorship shows humanity

By Tommy Lee Wickered  
Contributing Writer

My name is Tommy Lee Wickered. I'm 58 years old. I'm incarcerated for voluntary manslaughter. I took a 57-year deal for my sentence, so my Earliest Possible Release Date) is 2045. I'm on my 23<sup>rd</sup> year of my fifth prison term. Add all my terms up and I've spent 35 years of my 58 years on earth as an incarcerated person.

It was not until the California Department of Corrections implemented the R, which represents Rehabilitation, but there were some officers who did not want rehabilitation on their patches and some incarcerated people looked at that word as disrespectful.

Here we are two decades later. Without the PPF Progressive Programming Facility yard in Lancaster and the programs in San Quentin, I would not be here writing this letter for KidCAT and helping implement this California model. Rehabilitation was all I needed to become my authentic self.

KidCAT was one of the first groups that caught my attention, however I was not a youth offender. I was also working on accomplishing my first two goals in the San Quentin GED and running my first 26.2 Marathon.

As I continued with my programming, the founder, leader, and facilitators of KidCAT who were also involved in those groups started to take interest in me. San Quentin was the

first prison I paroled from in 1990, when I had just turned 23 years old.

And the OGs were not asking me if I have an education, need to work on my childhood trauma, sobriety of anger! It was the complete opposite. They taught me everything I need to be the best outlaw I could be. My walk is 100% positive now. Youngsters are smart; if you're full of crap, no youngster will respect anything you say. I did not want these youngsters going through that level 4 lifestyle I was blessed to live through.

KidCAT was a group of youth offenders that worked hard to get bills passed, like AB 1276 to help youth offenders avoid level 4 maximum security and override to a lower level.

I've been blessed to mentor several youngsters and watch them become their authentic selves and, better yet, amazing returning citizens and assets to their communities. It's an honor to say this to you all. KidCAT has so many programs within itself.

One day I was looking for a space to teach American Sign Language, and the Chairman at the time Kenny said I can teach 10 guys in the back corner of KidCAT. So that is what I did.

I wanted to work with at-risk Deaf youth in Lancaster Prison. I have an older brother who is deaf and I used to smoke weed and drink alcohol with him. I never thought in a million years they would

ship 11 incarcerated Deaf to San Quentin and I would be their interpreter, or that I would start my own ASL class. Including my new deaf friends in the San Quentin community was my new goal.

Several incarcerated Deaf have completed the Juvenile Lifer Support Group, focused on Board Prep and contributing and causative factors of their crime, as well as our First Step program that focused on childhood trauma. KidCAT is supporting people that are often excluded from other communities, preyed on and even brutally murdered.

Some of these incarcerated were YOP and never got what the hearing community did through KidCAT, and the help of all the amazing facilitators of KidCAT.

I am so happy and grateful to say several of the Deaf short time offenders have paroled sooner due to their positive programming and the want to change. KidCAT has included three deaf lifers in JLSG and First Step.

One of my Deaf friends, who I have grown with and see as my little brother, has been found suitable to go home soon. Two others are going to the parole board and, with the knowledge they need for board and the grace of God, they will both be out in more than two years.

Seven years of KidCAT and I keep watching it get better and better. YOPs, Youth Offender Program and now the Deaf community. Let's go KidCAT. Two thumbs up!

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

## News Briefs across the nation

By Bostyon Johnson Managing Editor



1. **California**  
(Associated Press) – Prosecutors in Los Angeles County will be able to

recommend the death penalty in rare and egregious cases. Jess Farris, senior policy counsel for ACLU in Southern California, said the issue is failed policy relics. "The issues that have driven L.A. voters to repeatedly reject the death penalty still ring true... it's tragic fallibility, and its endorsement of brutality and murder as solutions to complex problems," said Farris.



2. **Arizona**  
(Associated Press) – With over 100 people on Death Row, Arizona

lawmakers are considering a proposal that replaces lethal injections with firing squads as the method of execution as of 2026. Arizona has experienced setbacks like obtaining the drug for execution and having enough staff. The current law lets those convicted prior to November 1992 be given the option of lethal injection or the gas chamber.



3. **Texas**  
(Associated Press) – Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South

Carolina and Utah have been authorized to use firing squads as another method of execution. John Banzhaf, a professor emeritus of law at George Washington University Law School, said "a number of states are beginning to experiment with new methods of execution ... because of the problems with lethal injection."



4. **New York**  
(Associated Press) – A 22-day-long union strike over working

conditions, resulted in prison guards being fired because they did not return to work. "Termination letters have been sent to over 2,000 officers who remained on strike," said Commissioner Daniel Martuscello. During the strike, incarcerated prisoners complained about the deteriorating conditions, causing New York Governor Kathy Hochul to send in the National Guard to assist with operations.



5. **Maryland**  
(Bloomberg Law) – Incarcerated workers at an open-air recycling

facility in Baltimore County are asking for support under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Workers perform nine- to twelve-hour shifts in harsh weather and wear discarded coats just to stay warm. The Fourth Circuit US Court of Appeals said "There's 'no categorical rule' that the FLSA can't cover incarcerated workers' when they work outside their detention facility's walls."



6. **Maine**  
(Daily Bulldog) – A new bill, LD648, aims to give people

convicted as young adults a second chance by expanding community supervision. Eligibility for the program includes anyone who has displayed positive programming while incarcerated, has served a minimum of 15 years of their sentence, and committed their crime before the age of 26. One goal of the bill is to give people in prison hope for early release.



# Native Hawaiian religious group receives ukuleles

By Bostyon Johnson  
Managing Editor

“This is probably the best gift I got in prison,” said resident Talia Opeti, holding one of 11 new ukuleles donated by the Rossmoor Ukulele Club and given to the Native Hawaiian Religious Group at San Quentin.

Herb Salomon, founder of the Rossmoor Ukulele Club, visited SQ with four other guests to meet the talented recipients and to experience their donations at work.

“I came because I think if someone doesn’t come to visit, they hold a stereotype about the people who are in prison. I’ve gained a sense of respect for you all because you have experienced adversity in your lives and you have come back from it,” Salomon said.

Before the residents shared their musical talents, they shared the most vulnerable parts of themselves, which included naming their victims, their sentence, and insight about how they ended up in prison. The sentence lengths ranged from 25-years-to-life to one person who said he is serving a quadruple life sentence.

Resident Harold Meeks, one of the longest standing members of the group, shared the history of the group.

“The group was created in 2012 because there were a lot of Pacific Islanders at the prison and we needed a space to practice our religion,” said Meeks. “After some challenges trying to locate



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Native Hawaiian Religious group members

a space in the crowded prison, the group finally settled down in Chapel C.”

Resident Kelon Williams discussed his love of food and how it connected him to his culture. He said coming to prison, there wasn’t a space where his culture gathered to practice their religion.

He recalled doing performances at Solano State Prison in 2003 where the guys would use guitars and sometimes slap their hands on their knees because they did not have ukuleles, but then he came to San Quentin.

“There really wasn’t a place for us in prison. It wasn’t really until I came to San Quentin that I met the brothers here and I regained that connection to my identity,” said Williams,

noting that the group has helped him connect to other people.

A few members reminisced about how difficult it was at first performing in prison, saying it wasn’t all fun and dance because there were people who did not understand the culture and perceived the religious dance as a bunch of men in dresses.

“There were a lot of hecklers at first, but once we started playing at events there was a newfound respect for our culture,” said resident Rodel Pulido.

Resident Taiosisi Matangi talked about the comfort he feels with his brothers. “This group has broken down the walls of segregation and by us performing, it brings so much joy and happiness to a place where that is lacking,” he said.

Art Salzfass, a 90-year-old member of the Rossmoor club shared his upbringing as an orphaned kid and said he could relate, not with the prison experience, but dealing with adversity. He said that his visit to San Quentin could be summed up into two words, *tabula rasa*, which mean a “blank slate.”

“And what happened is, I came in here and you guys wrote on it in three dimensions,” said Salzfass. “I see that what’s happening here is everyone is planting a seed and it is growing a forest. It’s the songs, it’s the sounds.”

The 16 incarcerated group members performed three Native Hawaiian pieces. The first performance was “Ulupalakua.”

During this piece, nine

residents danced in native Hawaiian attire and kukui necklaces while the remaining members sang and played their newly donated ukuleles in the background. The next song was “Pahoho,” which included all 16 group members as the guests swayed side to side in chairs while singing the words of each song. The final number was “Wahine ‘Ilikea.” As they performed, the guests wore smiles on their faces as they watched the men embrace their culture.

Resident Fonuamana Fua hala said the group allowed him to have a better understanding of people, something he can carry with him beyond prison walls.

“It’s a matter of being patient, understanding, and putting my pride to the side,” Fua hala said. “This group gives me the opportunity to share joy, love, and appreciation for other peoples’ skills and talents.”

Resident Freddy Huante said that he was used to being the person who sat quietly in the background during yard events, but he recalled how members of the Native Hawaiian Religious Group supported and included him.

“It taught me how to express myself and be vulnerable in a group, like being here with you today,” said Huante. “You are all a part of my support system now and I look forward to continuing my growth.”

When discussing mental health and playing music in the group, resident Calvin Williams said that the group gave him a space to speak

up and lean on his brothers when he was going through personal difficulties.

“This is the best mental health for me,” Williams said. “I’m not a saint and I’m not proud of a lot of things, but I am proud of this group.”

After hearing the stories from the incarcerated men and witnessing their commitment to each other, Farhad Partovi said he was very emotional.

“Today, for me, this is the most amazing moment just hearing your stories,” said Partovi. “All I can do is cry; just seeing and knowing you is a life-changing moment for me.”

Mindy Zuckerman agreed with those sentiments and shared a few words with the group.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be invited to something like this. To be able to give you ukuleles was a gift to me, just as it was to you,” Zuckerman said.

The visitors noted that this visit changed their perspective of what they believed prison to be.

During the closing, residents expressed their appreciation for the guests coming to San Quentin and for all of sponsor Aunty Adel Serafino’s support. Resident and moderator of the event Johnny Deneng closed out with some final words.

“We are deeply grateful for your presence today. It has been a confidence booster to see that people out there still care,” said Deneng. “It is affirmation for us as we work to become better men, sons, brothers, fathers, partners, and people in the community.”

# Resource Fair provides valuable information for re-entrants

By Michael Callahan  
Staff Writer

Several barriers lie ahead of a reentrant from prison so connecting them with resources and programs prior to leaving prison can be instrumental to successfully reentering society and lowering recidivism.

Hundreds of residents gathered in San Quentin’s Garden Chapel to collect valuable information that will help them transition from prison to their communities and improve their quality of life.

“Transitional resources are a foundation for success. It is imperative we reach out to organizations to provide tangible resources for reentry,” resident People In Blue representative Arthur Jackson said.

The catalyst for the fair was when San Quentin’s Community Resource Office requested to collaborate with the resident-run People In Blue. Jackson said,

“Information is power. We look forward to keeping this going to solidify access to resources.”

Despite the rain, dozens of visitors answered the call to come in; they passed out printouts for a variety of programs, services, pamphlets, and business cards. Services for employment assistance, housing assistance, education, vocational training, and financial planning littered the tables manned by representatives from several reentry organizations.

“I was caught by surprise when I came up to the chapel area,” resident Jose Navas said. “It is an awesome thing to be given resources for work upon release.”

Navas said he will be up for the possibility of release in a few months and was ecstatic to see people come into prison to provide needed resources. “Information for housing and employment is of great value and important for reentry.”

Some of the organizations that showed up were Back to Work, Planting Justice, Safe Return Project, Bay Area Freedom Collective, and A New Way to Life.

Sidney Afsarzadehh manned one of the three tables occupied by Project Rebound, which helps formerly incarcerated students transfer into a college like Cal State Humboldt. She said she works in Pelican Bay, where residents can obtain a Communications degree from Humboldt. “I have met a lot of great individuals and I am encouraged to see some of the great things individuals are doing in prison.”

Resident Eric Camanera came to prison at 16 years old and after serving more than 30 years in prison said he had been waiting weeks for the resource fair. He said he was found suitable months back and came to obtain information on employment.

“Five Keys seems like it fits me like a ring on a finger,”

Camanera said. “I can go there and they pay me for work and train me for a career, something I can retire on.”

Another organization that garnered lots of attention was Cal PEP. According to representative Michael Benjamin, their main goal is to provide outreach and support services to marginalized communities, especially those who lack access to health services.

“Our agency helps to remove some of the barriers and educate individuals on what is available and connect them to those resources. We know people just need a certain level of help and we do all we can to get people resources and services,” Benjamin said.

Resident Tristan Lynch said events in San Quentin like the resource fair highlight the grace and opportunity an individual needs to create change in their life.

“Being able to see and hear from individuals that want

to help you succeed in life is uplifting and motivational,” Lynch said. “It makes you want it just a little bit more. Anything is possible with hard work and helping hands.”

**JOBS FOR FELONS:**

Information provided by [felonsorg.com](http://felonsorg.com)

- Ace Hardware
- Alaska Airlines
- American Express
- Bed, Bath & Beyond
- Best Foods
- BF Goodrich
- Black and Decker
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield
- Canon USA
- Chrysler
- ConAgra Foods
- Dell Corporation
- Dollar Rent A Car
- Dole Foods
- Duracell
- Eddie Bauer
- Epson
- Exxon
- Fruit of the Loom

- General Electric
- General Mills
- Hewitt associates
- IBM
- Kraft Foods
- L.A. Times
- Men's Wearhouse
- Miller Brewing Company
- New York Times
- Newsweek
- Norsdtrom's
- PACTIV
- Pepsi-Co
- Phillip Morris
- Restaurant Depot
- Rubbermaid Inc.
- Sara-Lee
- Sears & Roebuck
- Sheraton Hotels
- Showtime Networks
- Sony
- Trader Joe's
- Tyson Foods
- Uhaul
- U.S. Cellular
- Uneven Investments
- UPS
- US Steel Corp.
- Verizon
- Xerox

# Ramadan means self-discipline, not just abstaining

By Jerry Maleek Gearin  
Journalism Guild Chair

The Muslim community at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center shares their experience of fasting in the Month of Ramadan, fulfilling a decree of their faith.

According to the Arabic dictionary the word *fasting* comes from the Arabic word *Siyam*, which is defined as “to abstain.” *Ramadan* is an Arabic word that means “to heat, to burn,” and it is the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

“O ye who believe fasting has been ordained for you, as it was ordained for those before you, so that you may practice self-restraint,” says the Holy Qur’an Chapter 2, Verse 183.

Muslim men and women

throughout the world abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations with their spouses 29-30 days, from sun up until sun down once a year, according to Islamic tradition.

SQ resident Chester “Ibrahim” Gonzales said that he serves his community while fasting by volunteering to prepare the evening meals. He said that, he tries to submit to the will of God as much as he can in the month of Ramadan.

After he finishes his work, Gonzales said, when he hears the call to prayer for Maghrib [the early evening prayer] he tries to squeeze into the front row, because there are a lot of blessings in the front.

“If I don’t make it to the front row, I feel disappointed with my efforts,” Gonzales said. “I

try to be close to my Sheikh [SQ’s Muslim Chaplain] to spend as much time as possible with my spiritual guide.”

Gonzales says that, when returning to his cell, he calls his mother, and for one hour he reads Qur’an to her. Afterward, he reflects for 20 minutes on how he could make the next day more productive. Closing out the day, Gonzales performs his final prayers between 9:30 pm and 10 pm.

SQ resident Keith “Al-Amin” Carter says this Ramadan is his 20<sup>th</sup> year of fasting and fulfilling his duties prescribed by God. He wakes up before sunrise and indulges in a morning meal and drinks plenty of water to stay hydrated while fasting.

“Fasting requires

self-discipline. People who don’t have discipline, while fasting, they’re fooling themselves,” Carter said. “Fasting causes me to have a better relationship with Allah (God).”

He added that by abstaining from worldly things it caters to a healthier lifestyle. When his stomach is empty, he’s aware and more focused.

SQ resident and Chapel clerk, Andrew “Ahmad” Tungseth, says his day of fasting begins at 5 am, when he prays an early morning prayer called *Tahajjud*.

He eats a pre-dawn meal [suhoor] between 5:45 and 6 am and stops eating at least 20 minutes before Fajar [pre-dawn prayer].

Tungseth says that during Ramadan he reads

one-thirtieth of the Holy Qur’an each day, as prescribed by Islamic tradition.

“I spend as much time as possible in the remembrance of Allah, [and] sending the blessings of Allah on our beloved Prophet Muhammad,” Tungseth said. “I routinely practice this to remain God-conscious, to insure my fast is accepted [by God].”

After Fajar prayer Tungseth performs a voluntary mid-morning prayer called Duha. He stated that for those who observe this prayer, a door opens in Jannah [heaven].

Michael “Mikael” Walker II said he has been practicing Islam for 19 years. He says fasting gives him the ability of greater self-restraint and an appreciation for the sustenance that Allah

(God) has provided us.

“I break my fast by eating dates [fruit]. It provides the necessary sugar I need, and sometimes water, as prescribed by Prophet Muhammad,” Walker said. “Fasting enables me to acknowledge Allah and become closer to my Lord.”

He said that at the end of Ramadan, Muslims observe Eid-ul-Fitr, a celebratory Islamic holiday. The community breaks their fast together by eating something small, such as a date, and give Sadiqah [charity] to the poor.

Then congregation chants, praising their Lord, and listens to a sermon; Afterward, the community indulges in a feast from one to three days, with the likes of lamb, rice, and a variety of pies.



