

San Quentin News

EST. 1940

PRODUCED BY THE INCARCERATED — ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOL. 2024 NO. 1 JANUARY 2024 — ISSUE 164 SANQUENTINNEWS.COM SAN QUENTIN, CALIFORNIA 94964 POPULATION 3,504

1000 MILE CLUB CELEBRATES FRANK RUONA

Running club honors head coach for 18 years of service

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

Honoring 18 years of service, San Quentin's 1000 Mile Club celebrated the retirement of Frank Ruona, the inspiring and motivating track coach who has influenced the lives of incarcerated persons through discipline and hard work.

Residents and outside guests gathered in Chapel B to honor Ruona at a November 27 post-season banquet, the first such event for the club. The evening began with attendees enjoying pepperoni and cheese pizza, bottled water, and cookies.



Photo by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Volunteer Tim Fitzpatrick, an assistant for nine SQ marathons, hosted the event. His wife Dianne has been volunteering at the prison for 15 years. The Fitzpatrick duo will take charge of the club's leadership.

"I express my deepest appreciation for Coach

Frank Ruona and the volunteers for their time and effort," said Tim Fitzpatrick.

Resident Tommy Wickerd, the 1000 Mile Running Club secretary and co-host of the event, introduced club members whom the coach has helped.

"This man has volunteered 18 years of his life to the incarcerated at San Quentin," said Wickerd. "He never looked at us as prisoners."

Resident Steven Warren, a recent marathon finisher, explained that running to him consists of two parts — self-care and community building.

"When I finished the marathon, I said to Frank, this is for you, and the legacy you've created with this brotherhood. You have invested something valuable [18 years of service] that can't be got back," said Warren.

Resident Jose Farjardo, the winner of San Quentin's recent marathon, spoke in both English and Spanish about the coach's influence.

"I am grateful and blessed for the impact Coach Frank had on my life," said Farjardo. "I never imagined running a marathon, the documentary '26.2 To Life' inspired me to run the marathon."

Coach Ruona then took the stage to a standing ovation as the crowd applauded and cheered for him. Some participants shouted, "Thank you, Coach."

The 1000 Mile Club presented Ruona with a varsity jacket. Wickerd said, "We are not allowed to hug volunteers; let this jacket be a symbol of that hug."

Ruona gave Wickerd recognition as the "heart and soul of the running club, Tommy kept the running club together throughout the pandemic," said the coach.

"Whatever you are going to do, do the best," said Ruona. "I am very impressed that those who have paroled all are doing well. We had a number of the formerly incarcerated who have run races on the outside."

SQ Resident and former U.S. Olympian Ralph

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Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Longtime mentor and leading uku'lele teacher Auntie Adel and other key volunteers and supporters recieved honors for their dedication in service.

MAKAHIKI FESTIVAL CELEBRATES CULTURE, FAMILY, COMMUNITY

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

The incarcerated members of San Quentin's Native Hawaiian Religious Group cannot go to their homeland, so they brought Hawaii to San Quentin through their annual Makahiki celebration.

The well-attended festive November event in the Garden Chapel featured friends, family, a delicious meal, and ceremonial dances and prayers. Lively conversation and island-vibe music played over the sound system, filling the room with a warm ambiance as everyone sat at tables set in white.

Louis Sále, the NHRG's resident spiritual leader, started the festivities with an *oli aloha* chant to "honor our ceremony and community" with the sound of crashing waves in the background.

"Today we celebrate *Lono Makahiki*, one of the four gods, who is the god of feasting,

peace, and rejuvenation. At its root, it's a harvest celebration, a universal expression of thanks and appreciation," Sále said, noting that it also serves as the Hawaiian way to celebrate the New Year and has an association with the Pleiades constellation.

"This is a time to remember our loved ones who have passed, the year that has passed, to spend time with loved ones, and plan for the future — for feasting, hula, and playing games," Sále said.

After a moment of silence for victims of the Maui wildfires, Kumu Patrick Makuakane delivered an opening prayer in Hawaiian.

Before the hula and haka dances and the *uku'lele* songs commenced, Sále talked about his insight into the group's journey to redemption through practicing his culture and the *Ho'oponopono* way of a spiritual foundation built on righteousness.

"Us incarcerated gentlemen weren't always the angels that you see today," Sále said. "I think I speak on behalf of the Native Hawaiian Religious Group that we are sorry to our families for the poor choices that we made; we are doing our best to atone for our mistakes and do our best to make our amends."

Sále later noted the irony of having experienced toxic masculinity in his younger days and then finding healthy masculinity through his traditional native culture at — of

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ForwardThis goes to camp

SQ film crew spotlighting youth offenders in fire camps

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

San Quentin's *ForwardThis* broke unprecedented ground by spending seven weeks at the Sierra Conservation Center in Jamestown, Calif., filming a documentary on youth offenders going through fire camp training.

For the first time in CDCR history, incarcerated filmmakers travelled from one prison to another to make a film.

Three incarcerated documentarians of *ForwardThis* — Anthony Gomez, Edmond Richardson, and Vince Turner — filmed in collaboration with notable Hollywood producer Scott Budnick and his production company One Community Productions. They arrived at Jamestown in September and returned to San Quentin in November.

"Leaving to film incarcerated men in another prison will hopefully open the door for more opportunities," Turner said. "As we break these walls and barriers down, a trust must be built."

In August, Budnick and celebrity Victor "Vicblends" Fontanez first met with the *ForwardThis* production team. Their pitch of



Courtesy of SCC PIO Lt. Jauregui

Edmond Richardson, Vince Turner, and Anthony Gomez take a break from filming to pose for a photo.

the idea of an eight-week internship received both enthusiasm and hesitation. "[We] can set a precedent by filming the first-ever program like this in the nation," Budnick said about filming the youth offender fire camp program.

"Professional filmmakers are shooting this whole thing and for any of you to work alongside them is the greatest experience of all time," Budnick said.

In July, the legislature passed a bill that allows youth offenders the opportunity to serve their time at a fire camp pilot project instead of just sitting in prison. The bill amended certain

carceral point system restrictions that would have prevented them from qualifying to stay at a minimum-security facility.

The correctional staff and residents at Jamestown welcomed the *ForwardThis* team with curiosity and bombarded them with questions.

SCC's PIO Lt. Jauregui, and his twin brother, Capt. Jauregui, had committed to the project and helped every step of the way. Turner said Lt. Jauregui considered the project one of the high-lights of his career.

Turner called the experience not only mind-blowing but also groundbreaking. The full support from San Quentin and Jamestown administrations, CDCR, and Budnick's production team gave them everything they needed to make the documentary. "If they could open the doors for this, they could for others as well," Turner said.

"[This] opportunity would not have presented itself if I wasn't doing the right thing," Gomez said. "I feel honored. [The administration] would not have just taken this chance on anyone. It is the work that we do at the Media Center, the work we do as a team, that got us that opportunity, this experience," Gomez said.

As a filmmaker, Gomez said he felt grateful to play a part in cinematically relating the narrative of the fire camp residents. "I understand the importance and value of this opportunity and how I am helping tell their story."

The *ForwardThis* crew assembled a complete shot list in pre-production before they left San Quentin. The film focuses on 14 youth offenders who had entered the fire camp program, with

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PROFILE



Photos by Salvador Joaquin // The Pulse

SQ's gardener protects, nurtures rare piece of beauty

Resident Adan 'Pablo' Sanchez dedication and commitment to his daily work

By Steven Rhashyid Zinnamon
Contributing Writer

In an environment usually considered devoid of beauty, one man at San Quentin has made it his mission to change the narrative.

Adan “Pablo” Sanchez, a resident at the Q, is the gardener in the education area. In the hustle and bustle of work, education and rehabilitative self-help programs, Sanchez can be easy to miss. Yet, his work as a landscape architect is admired daily.

“I think it’s cool to see flowers and plants around here,” stated a resident. “I’ve been down a long time and on many different yards where nature like this is non-existent. It’s soothing.”

What is so interesting about Sanchez is his love for nature and living things, and his care and concern for his surroundings.

Over the past few years, Sanchez has not just picked up excess trash and

watered grass. He has worked to beautify the education garden area on the prison’s Lower Yard. Tapping into his experience as an agricultural architect, Sanchez is an artist who designs, grooms and cultivates this area.

“I love to plant and nurture the seedlings I acquire,” he said. Sanchez said he likes to strategically move and replant certain flowers and plants in different areas according to their needs. This helps the plants grow and stay healthy and strong.

He went on to explain in detail his love for botany. “When I was ten years old, some people came to my country of Oaxaca, Mexico,” he said. “They came to teach us how to grow seedlings and that’s when I fell in love with nature.”

Pointing to the dismal pay he receives for his work, Sanchez was asked why he did what he did. “It’s not about the money,” he said. “It’s what I get out of it. It’s calming and relaxing; its therapeutic.”



Resident Adan "Pablo" Sanchez works the garden of SQ Lower Yard's Education complex. On any given morning, he cultivates the flowers and takes care of the lawn.

Leading the charge on reimagining San Quentin

By Timothy Hicks
Staff Writer

To help put into effect Gov. Gavin Newsom’s new re-imagined concept for San Quentin, the prison’s top administrators appointed Lieutenant B. Haub, “The best man” for the task, according to San Quentin Public Information Officer, Lt. G. Berry.

Some residents and staff agree that retraining a core group of officers is an essential component to making relationships between staff and the residents.

“The goal is to get [residents] with the most problems to gain the trust of staff,” said Lt. Haub. “We have to show [the residents] that we are here to help and not treat them like caged animals. We have to show them that we are not here to hurt anyone.”

A typical day for Lt. Haub is answering questions from the incarcerated residents that approached him. Those around him know him for his easygoing and approachable nature that is complemented by a poised persona. Currently, he oversees the prison’s South Block housing units that includes the facility’s Earned Living Unit (ELU).

Haub rose through CDCR and San Quentin’s ranks. He was promoted to sergeant when the prison had a reception center. Later he became lieutenant of West Block. He also ran a successful program in the prison’s H-Unit.

The first group of officers being trained at San Quentin will set the standard for other staff members to implement. In the training, Haub teaches empathetic approaches when dealing with incarcerated persons, which includes mental health issues to daily encounters.

“I am loyal and trustworthy,” Lt. Haub said. He notes his 30 years of faithful marriage to the same woman and raising his three children. He modestly declined to speak of all the good character traits he possesses.

“He is a fair person who helps people with their issues,” Lt. Berry, said. “He is a mentor who gives great advice and is consistent in what he does.” Lt. Berry, one of the many officers trained by Lt. Haub, worked for him in one of the roughest parts of the prison.



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

While overseeing Badger Section, one of the more challenging parts of the prison, Lt. Haub said he had to deal with fights and stabbings every day.

“There were validated gang members and it was constantly active,” he said. But it was a balance in the way he used his judgment that helped.

“He knows that right is right and wrong is wrong,” said Berry. She added, in regard to the future for all residents and staff, mainly, reshaping the mindsets of all stakeholders, Haub understands the significance of the concept.

Lt. Berry said she considers Lt. Haub similar to a counselor, a psychologist, and a conflict manager, all combined in one person.

“It is important for staff and the resident population to have good relations. He is a solid dude,” Berry said. “We chose a good person to coordinate Donner Section, the (Earned Living Unit program).”

One thing residents in Donner Section understand is the rules to stay in it. However, according to Lt. Haub, if a resident receive a disciplinary write-up they must leave the ELU. The residents must remain very respectful and the ELU tolerates no racial division. “We are all human,” said Lt. Haub.

“I have been in the ELU with Lt. Haub

for about a year,” said resident Darrell Davis. “Ever since I’ve met him, he always has been fair and approachable. He treats you like a human. He is honest.” As for the training, Davis said, “His training will open up doors for other officers to start believing in this new model at the prison. [They will believe it] because of the character he displays.”

The veteran lieutenant has spent decades in the system. He has firsthand experience in transforming and reshaping incarcerated places from bad to good.

“I talk to at least 10 residents a day about personal problems or problems with other personnel or staff,” Lt. Haub said. “I have had guys come into my office because I also do appeals and (Rules Violation Report), RVR hearings for all kinds of reasons.”

Lt. Haub does not allow naysayers or anyone not ready to accept the new model of the prison to deter him from leading the way toward change.

“There is some staff disagreement, and likewise, some [residents] who do not want to change,” Lt. Haub said. “But, 90% of residents are paroling so we want to make it more normal. And residents who are better equipped to parole make communities better. So, as we get over each hurdle, it will get better and better and we’ll get through it.”

As for those officers and residents who refuse to adjust to the new model for the prison, Lt. Haub said that they will have other options.

“Other officers will get on board or transfer or retire,” said Lt. Haub, “because officers [and residents] here are adapting to the California Model.”

The elimination of Death Row and the building of a high tech education center are among the biggest changes coming to San Quentin.

“The new Education Center will include a coffee shop, restaurant, and a grocery store. I will have a cup of coffee in the morning with residents and then go to work,” Lt. Haub said. “The goal is to get more normalization for residents, so they are better equipped to reenter society.”

So far, there has been two training sessions. The goal is to train all of the remaining staff at the prison for the new model.”

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FAITH

Christian community honors Pastor Tom's decade of service

SQ's Christian community honors pastor's ten years of dedicated service

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

The Christian community at San Quentin hosted a celebratory banquet for Pastor Tom Pham's 10th anniversary of leading Bible studies.

Food, fun, and frolicking festivities accompanied the event held in Chapel B on November 30.

For the past decade, Pastor Tom has led a weekly non-denominational Bible study as well as services on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. He has also pastored the Open Arms International Church in San Francisco for the last 12 years.

"He's an awesome pastor, genuine, and committed to the study. He is faithful, and you can confide in him. He is very approachable," said resident Bible study student Anthony Gomez.

Dozens of residents and outside guests, including formerly incarcerated individuals, erupted into applause and well wishes when Pastor Tom entered the chapel, which was adorned with Christmas decorations. The sprit-filled congregation gave thanks for his service to San Quentin's Christian community and the Lord.

"Pastor Tom is diverse and very rooted in the change of our lives through scripture," said praise and incarcerated worship leader Mike Adams.

Pastor Tom revealed, "I was originally Buddhist and converted to Christianity when I married my wife, Helen, 30 years ago. That's when God called me."

Choir member Michael



Clockwise from top: Pastor Tom speaks to the congregation of Bible study students. Helen, Tom's wife, poses with her husband of 30 years. Michael Adams hitting high notes with the choir.



Fangman said, "I enjoy how dynamic he is and how he understands us and is filled with God's love. He's a great example of the angels who minister to us from the outside community, who see us as brothers and co-heirs in Christ rather than prisoners."

The spirit-filled festivities began with praises for the Lord and prayer. The pastor delivered



an opening message of hope and love with an invitation to open hearts for the Lord. Next on the agenda was a banquet followed by praise and worship songs led by Adams and accompanied by a band.

"Pastor Tom is awesome. He's a really good guy on fire for the Lord," said resident Sean Damewood, who has attended the

Rabbi, Imam come together to host discussion on unity amid war

By Anthony Manuel Carvalho
and Michael Callahan
Staff Writers

On October 28, Rabbi Shleffar and Imam Muhammad Fasih held an open campus discussion at San Quentin on war and death around the world.

Thirty-five prison residents came together with the two religious leaders to share their concerns of the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine, as well as the overall psyche of this nation.

Rabbi Shleffar opened the interdenominational ceremony with the Jewish Prayer for the Dead, El Maley Rakhamim. The guided meditations allowed Shleffar to discuss the current tragedies.

"Five hundred thousand lost in Ukraine, nine thousand lost in the Middle East, nineteen in Maine, one lost in New York— Wade Al Fayoume, stabbed 26 times for being Palestinian. The Middle East madness is crazy, so is the rest of the world," Rabbi Shleffar said.

As leader of San Quentin's Jewish Community, the Rabbi asked his Jewish ensemble to play a traditional American song to set the tone. Shleffar asked everyone in attendance to partake in Bob Dylan's, "Blowin' In The Wind," calling attention to the similarities between current times and the 1960s. After the song, the Rabbi opened the floor to questions or feelings.

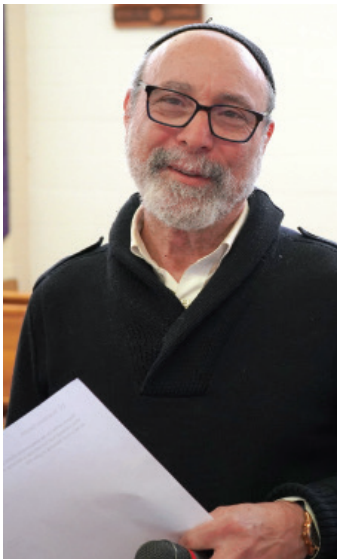
Resident Lamavis "Shorty" Comundoiwilla, opened the Q&A by saying, "It appears there are major issues and [some are created] from the outside looking in. Everyone has their rights, and it is within their right to protect what they have. If someone wants peace you have to give the peace



Imam Muhammad Fasih

"Israel and Palestine have co-existed for decades, centuries. It goes back to Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, who were all cousins and who co-existed. Let's not forget this."

—Imam Muhammad Fasih



Rabbi Shleffar

"The core to bias is thinking that what we know is the truth. We must not do this; we must continually ask questions, because if we think we have the answer, we are actually stuck."

—Rabbi Shleffar

you want."

Imam Fasih addressed the tension and encouraged everyone to recognize their feelings and the sensitivity of the subject.

"No one's hands are clean in these senseless killings," said resident Ismael Freelon. "No one wants to come to the table to make sense of all of this. Why do we oppress each other?"

The Imam noted that the root of war is often in authorities

Isaac and Ishmael, who were all cousins and who co-existed. Let's not forget this."

The Imam then described God's compassion, saying God is aware of the oppression due to the lack of barriers between the oppressed and God.

Imam Fasih reminded the incarcerated participants that peace in prison can and must exist among all cultures and religions. He added that in prison, choosing sides does not help. "We must create love here. You can voice your opinion just do not become the aggressor and pray we will all co-exist like before. We want peace, prosperity, health, and good living. God bless all of you."

Rabbi Shleffar added, "The core to bias is thinking that what we know is the truth. We must not do this; we must continually ask questions, because if we think we have the answer, we are actually stuck."

Other participants chimed in, insisting that the inaccuracies in mainstream media misinforms the masses.

"Muslims will fight oppression, but will not become the oppressor and traditionalists remember that the '48 treaty created the territories of Israel and Palestine," Comundoiwilla said.

Rabbi Shleffar then prepared to close the event, reassuring the crowd that San Quentin will offer more interdenominational services during this time of strife. He said it is important to take moments for peace and stepping back when facing anger.

"If we want peace and believe in those words, from our hearts, we must model it within the prison walls. It starts here in this prison we know as San Quentin," said John Zeretzke, resident, and Jewish Music Clerk.

Honoring head coach Frank Ruona retirement

COACH

Continued from page 1

Ligons, one of the original members of the club, said previous club members have paroled and went on to great accomplishments.

Ruona, a U.S. Army veteran trained as an Airborne Ranger, received an honorable tribute from the San Quentin Veteran's Color Guard by displaying the United States, California's and the Army's Flag in celebration of freedom and service.

The crowd stood with the coach and the incarcerated veterans to salute America's Flags. Ruona also served tours in both Germany and Vietnam, he received an honorable discharge.

"Tonight maybe a farewell, but it is only a goodbye, the coach will be with us as we continue to train," Wickerd told the audience.

Resident Larry Ford, the club's previous president, then came to the stage to speak about his experience with Rouna.

"I was a shocked to see anyone that dedicated," said Ford. "It was raining, and some guys said he [Coach Frank]

will not show up, but there he was on the yard waiting on us."

Jamie "Happy" Paredas, a member of the San Quentin's deaf community, completed 6.25 miles of the marathon. He addressed the audience through an American Sign Language interpreter.

"When I first got here, there was no program for me, I felt isolated," signed Paredas. "God Bless you, I have mad respect for all of you. Thank you for inviting the deaf community; we felt the love and support, like family."

Another club member expounded on Ruona's influence on his life. "With Coach Frank's training and encouragement, I was able to complete my first marathon in 2017; I could not have accomplished that without his kindness and compassion," said club member John Levin.

At that point, the event recognized the San Quentin residents who had completed the November marathon. Ruona and volunteer Dianne Fitzpatrick presented certificates to the 24 finishers.

Farjardo, 42, the marathon winner, broke formerly incarcerated marathon champion Markelle "The Gazelle" Taylor's record. Farjardo's

"Tonight may be a farewell, but it is only a goodbye. The coach will be with us as we continue to train."

— Tommy Wickerd
Club president

time of 3:05:26 shattered Taylor's long-standing record of 3:10:42.

The second and third place finishers, William Campos and Ignacio Gutierrez, received certificates, as did the other 21 residents who finished.

Dianne Fitzpatrick thanked everyone for their support and wished them well in the future. She thanked Barbara Ruona, Frank's wife of 56 years.

She acknowledged Ruona's wife as a behind-the-scenes driving force, adding, "We would not have Frank if not for her."

"Frank is so passionate about the 1000 Mile Club, what makes him happy makes me happy," said Barbara Ruona.

"When you finish [a marathon], it's a life-changing moment for all of us — the coaches and runners," said Dianne Fitzpatrick.



Clockwise from top: Coach Frank Ruona speaks during his retirement ceremony, giving thanks for his SQ varsity jacket. Frank Ruona and Tommy Wickerd stand under a painting of Ruona, which decorates the wall of SQ's Donner Section. Frank with his wife Barbara Ruona.

Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

MAKAHIKI

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Makahiki event celebrates culture, family, community

all places — San Quentin. He said he felt a sense of redemption by coming back to his roots of hula dancing after walking away from it at age 14, having feared that it would make him look "soft."

"Lots of boys had sports or even gangs to show masculinity, but hula in the modern world wasn't always perceived that way. It's very healing to come back to it; it's good feeling for all of us," Sále said.

The event treated guests to moving musical performances, including a *uku'lele* song by Sále and his cellie, Tam Nguyen, dedicated to Sále's son and daughter in the audience. His son brought his girlfriend so that she could meet his father for the first time, and they all said they felt proud of him for leading the group.

"There was a healing element for them to come in and see the work we are doing," Sale said.

As part of the celebration, NHRG presented plaques of appreciation to key volunteers and supporters, including Nate Tan of the Asian Prisoner Support

Committee.

Tan said, "Every year, I'm blown away by your commitment to your healing. Not only your healing, but to the world's healings. Thank you, all!"

A final plaque of appreciation went, with roaring applause, to Auntie Adel, the group's beloved long-time volunteer, mentor, and *uku'lele* teacher.

"My background is in social work ... so I really, really do appreciate that you appreciate my volunteering," Adel said.

The group recited a prayer before serving plates heavy with teriyaki chicken, pulled pork, rice, frosted sweet bread, and taro and pineapple pie. "The ocean is sacred to our elementals ... the prayer is lifted, it rises, and it flies."

"When I first saw the dance and heard the music, it brought up so much emotion that I wanted to cry for joy," said Ken Osako, a new NHRG member, whose parents grew up in Lahaina. He said he looks forward to inviting his family for the next Makahiki event.

Clockwise from top: The Matangi family, one of the main contributors who made this event possible, happily smiling for a photo. Women from the Native Hawaiian Religious Group entertained the crowd with the traditional hula dance. Outside guests, families, and residents taking in the festivities while enjoying Polynesian food and drinks. Carlyle "Noah" Villazon, a member of NHRG, bonding with his mother.



Below: The Native Hawaiian Religious Group honors long-time mentor Auntie Adel.



CAMP

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Incarcerated film crew goes to camp

emphasis on four incarcerated persons from Valley State Prison, their journey through the training, and their rigorous physical fitness regime.

Before they filmed at fire camp, Budnick's production team had travelled to Valley State Prison to film the four YOPs and their preparations for fire camp. Budnick's co-producer Ameet Shukla coordinated with *ForwardThis* to ensure that they would have the proper equipment and tools for the shoot. He stayed in direct contact with producers and the production crew.

After meeting the veteran production crew, the collaboration with the *ForwardThis* team took off. The *ForwardThis* team appreciated how the professionals looked to them for feedback and direction on what to film. "We witnessed teamwork and camaraderie among the YOPs, as well as their development," Gomez said.

ForwardThis filmed from 9 AM to 5 PM daily, following the day-to-day living and activities of the firefighting trainees. The production team worked collaboratively with the heavy and expensive equipment the whole time, even in the 100-degree heat.

Gomez said the quality of shots from the *ForwardThis* team impressed Budnick's production company. "When we started using the same vernacular and vocabulary, they were like, let us get to work," Gomez said.

"I think to receive validity from the professionals is a reflection of our *ForwardThis* team and the training we received, which set me up to be in a position to work amongst these professionals," Gomez said. "This opportunity allows me to utilize the rehabilitative qualities I acquired working in the Media Center and take it to another community, one that hasn't been given the chances we have."

ForwardThis team member Ryan Pagan said that he appreciated the team having had this opportunity. He said everyone who has worked in the Media Center has taken part in one another's development. "I am living through them. I feel proud we helped each other get to where we are now," Pagan said.

Once the *ForwardThis* crew finished the filming of the physical fitness training, only two of them returned to San Quentin. Richardson received an invitation to continue participating in the fire program as a trainee, which allowed him to reside at the fire camp. He joined the program participants on scaling a steep rocky ravine called "Stairway to Heaven," part of the physical fitness curriculum.

"Working with Scott and his team, I am going to be a student all over again. I am going to be able to work beside professional filmmakers and learn everything they have to teach me," Richardson said.

Once finished with post-production, the documentary will likely distribute through Netflix or another major streaming service.

EVENT

Nonprofit's annual book fair returns to SQ Library

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

On December 1, San Quentin’s library hosted a Christmas book fair, which provided a vast selection of books for hundreds of residents to send to their loved ones.

Friends of San Quentin Library, a nonprofit organization, had collaborated with Bay Area libraries to donate more than 800 books.

“We are hoping to provide connection, to spread the love of reading, and to open the SQ Library to a bigger community,” said Kristi Kenney, the founder of Friends of SQ Library.

The idea for a family literacy event began when FOSQL was unsure what to do with a donation they received from Larkspur Library. Resident Kai Bannon suggested a book fair to Kenney and it has grown from there.

Attending the fair for the first time, resident Rick Namey searched the selections to find the perfect gift for his four-year-old son, Joseph.

“This is one of the best things I’ve ever seen since I’ve been in prison. It makes me feel great that I can do something for my son,” Namey said.

He expressed his thanks to everyone who made the gifts a reality.

Resident Khiem Tran and Han Dueong delighted at the variety of reading material and the opportunity to strengthen their bonds with their families.

“I appreciate this opportunity to connect with my son and show him how the power of reading can



Dante D. Jones // SQNews

enhance knowledge,” Tran said.

Dueong, incarcerated at the time of the birth of his niece and nephew, aims to stay connected in every way possible. “I want to know them, make a connection, and show I will be a part of their life from now on.”

Although sending books home might feel like a bittersweet experience for some residents, a spirit of appreciation and joy filled the atmosphere. Resident Maurice White had his hands full with the “Diary

of a Wimpy Kid” books he sent to his children. “It’s a blessing and I highly appreciate this opportunity,” he said.

Resident Jesus Barquin said he appreciates the book fair, for without events like this one and Toys-for-Tots, he could not send anything to his eight-year-old granddaughter. “I don’t have funds, nor am I there. Hopefully she understands this is what I can send her.”

“It makes me happy and sad;

happy to send her something from me, but sad to not be there to give it to her,” Barquin said. He said he felt great when he received a picture from her after the last time he sent her a gift.

Volunteers Pam Franklin and Lisa Joss of Book Passage bookstore and Diana St. James of the Larkspur Library came to San Quentin to help. Book Passage donated books, as did the Berkeley Public Library and the Larkspur Library.

Residents search the tabletops for the right book to send to their loved ones. Hundreds of residents enjoyed browsing an open selection of donated books.

“It is a gift to encourage literacy and education. Reading is a ticket to success in life and education opens the world,” Franklin said.

Berkeley’s children’s librarian Michael Kwende helped with book selections for younger readers. He said he felt great joy in helping the residents choose books that would suit their loved ones.

“I am surprised by the number of residents interested in the program,” Kwende said.

SQ’s librarian Charlotte Sanders said that reading with someone strengthens bonds. She said the event “melted her heart” as she watched residents carefully select books for their loved ones.

“It’s thrilling to bring light into a dark place, to bring connections and bonds,” Sanders said.

Resident librarian Deuce Williams was happy that he could offer input in the selection and organization process of the second book fair. As a father of four children, he believes in the importance of youth literacy and said a book fair encourages children to read.

“My kids do book reports once a month; I encourage them to read and write,” Williams said.

Residents support St. Jude's Children Hospital with food sale

By Dante D. Jones
Staff Writer

Looking to serve its residents and support kids, San Quentin hosted the second annual food truck event on its Lower Yard on November 16.

This time around, \$33, 644.70 was raised, of which 32% of the proceeds will be donated to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and Marin Foster Care.

As the residents walked down to the Lower Yard, most were excited to be greeted by the aromas of steak, orange chicken, fried chicken, and french fries.

“San Quentin came correct this time, man,” said resident Walter Burns. Burns, who ordered everything from a tri-tip sandwich with fries to churros and brownies, was ecstatic to be participating in this event again.

“This is gonna be the bomb right here,” he exclaimed. “Steak without the steak knife—you can’t beat that right there, man.”

Though the steak sandwich, churros, and brownies made their triumphant return, new menu choices like a spicy chicken sandwich, a veggie burger, and an orange chicken with rice bowl were offered to the population this time.

“I’m about to add to the dad-bod,” one resident playfully quipped while waiting in line to receive his order.

Andrew “Drewski” Blaskovich, owner of the Drewski’s food trucks, was happy to be back to serve the residents his dishes. He has been in the food truck business for 11 years.

“I’m stoked to be back and to be able to serve you guys some good food,” he said. Blaskovich said that he learned a lot the last time he was at San Quentin.

“Me and Robert [Lt. Gardea] worked on a new game plan identifying what would make the service go faster and more efficiently.”

However, not everyone was able to partake in the event. Jesse Milo, a resident here at The Q, expressed his disappointment at not being able to purchase any food because of the steep prices.

“I can’t ask my mom who’s almost 70 to send me money to buy a \$25 sandwich when she’s struggling to pay her bills... we just can’t afford it,” Milo said.

Milo said that although he supports the food sale event, the price markup just makes it impossible for people like him to get involved.

Lt. Gardea and Blaskovich both said



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Above: Residents wait in line for the delicious taste of giving back to the community through donations.

Below: Through their purchases, residents raised \$33,644.70, 32% of which will be donated to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Marin Foster Care.



that they were working on getting the prices down to make it affordable for the residents.

“Even out on the street, food trucks are expensive... and the prices in here are pretty comparable to what we’re paying out there,” Lt. Gardea said.

Blaskovich explained that because food prices are “crazy expensive,” a steak sandwich usually costs around \$17.

“It can end up being \$25 if you include sides,” he said. However, Blaskovich said that he would seriously look into finding a way to offer something that’s cheaper to produce yet is of the same quality.

“We want to continue to make you guys happy by providing high-quality, scratch-made food... but there’s always room for improvement,” he said.

Jaeda Montgomery, a Drewski’s employee who was serving cheeseburgers and fries, said she was humbled to be able to serve the incarcerated. She revealed that this was her first event working with Drewski’s and she understood what it meant to the residents because she herself had five felonies for protesting.

Montgomery said that being on the other side of the fence and now coming in as a free person was very triggering for her.

“I never imagined myself to be back in a setting like this,” Montgomery said. “But it also brings me joy that I’m able to bring food to the inmates [residents] because I literally understand how it is wanting something from the outside world... It means a lot to people.”

Residents discuss impact of Hip-Hop during roundtable

In October, nearly 50 San Quentin residents gathered to commemorate 50 years of Hip-Hop and to discuss about when their love for rap had started.

The symposium, held in Chapel B, brought out the raw and unapologetic truth, highlighting the impact of Hip-Hop on incarcerated persons at San Quentin, as well as the influence rap has on urban culture worldwide.

For some incarcerated individuals, rap music provides a voice in their dissociation from society. The artistry of Hip-Hop plays an integral part in their rehabilitative development.

“The therapeutic value of writing and storytelling is underappreciated. The process allows us to cleanse our emotions as writers, laymen and street narrators,” resident Steven “Rashiyd” Zinnamon said.

He added that he felt the public often fails to understand the cognitive value of Hip-Hop. “Our emotions play a part in our actions and insight; it is invaluable.”

Pastor Eric Nobles from the Prison Fellowship program led the conversation as participants talked about the moment they first fell in love with Hip-Hop.

The consensus was that Hip-Hop relates stories of genuine human experiences, community, and truth. For many residents, their love for Hip-Hop culture began with break dancing, graffiti tagging, rhythmic wordplay, clever lyricism, and melodious beats.

“I always was a fan of rhyming,” resident Demond Lewis said. “The storytelling, fashion, and culture of Hip-Hop drew me in.”

Bernard “Raheem” Ballard fell in love with the art form in the early ’80s, while living in New York. “Hip-Hop was a new way to express myself, rhythmically and with body motions that matched the beats,” Ballard said.

During the discussion, many participants said Hip-Hop is a way of life and Hip-Hop artists use imagery, emotion, and authenticity. Themes commonly reflect realities such as inequality, economic struggles, and societal issues.

Resident Jamal “Mac Mal”

Harrison said, “Rap ... allows us to express our stresses, and it is about our culture.”

Resident Maurice “Face Nation” Buckley fell in love with the themes of joy, triumph, pain, and struggle in ’90s-era rap. “Hip-Hop culture was about having fun, dancing, and parties,” Buckley said.

Outside guests at the event included Prison Fellowship advocate Dennis Perry and rapper Mandon “Wild” O’Neal.

For Perry, a former San Quentin resident, the symposium brought back memories of San Quentin after years of freedom. “There was nothing like this when I was here,” Perry said. “This opportunity allows people to express themselves, who they are, where you came from and the things you enjoy.”

A “cypher” — a circle around the presenting artist — formed in the center of the room. Besides various residents, the group League of Extraordinary Gentlemen and “Wild” presented their music. “Wild” rapped his hit “Soldier” that he said lets the spirit do the talking. He encouraged the crowd to shout “Jesus” loudly and often.

Resident Samuel “Sound” Jackson performed “The Pelican,” which prompted the audience to rise from their seats. Inspiration for the song came from an experience at a bus stop. Waiting for public transit, he felt angry and intended to use an obscene gesture at a passing car, but saw a child in the backseat. At that moment, he reflected on the beauty in everything, which effected a change in his mindset.

Whenever he raps “Pelican,” the song touches the hearts of listeners as it tells a story that switches from hate to love.

Recently, Jackson experimented with using his chest to create a melodious beat; he also began embracing the way his voice sounded when digitally altered, to create a “felody,” or a melody created by a felon. For him, blending melody and verse resembles uniting a man — melody — and a woman — verse.

“Hip-hop is therapeutic,” Jackson said.

—Michael Callahan

PROGRAM



Dao Ong // SQNews

A Settlers of Catan game built by residents Terry Hall and Arturo Vazquez from playing cards, cardboard, and printed intructions.

Wall Busters hosts first SQ Game Night to bridge the divide between staff and residents

By Randy C. Thompson
Staff Writer, and
Bostyon Johnson,
Managing Editor

On Game Night at San Quentin, over 70 residents filled the gym to play tabletop games alongside a single member of the prison staff. Residents filled a dozen tables lining the basketball court as Game Night aimed to showcase the four specific games of “Dungeons & Dragons,” a role-playing game; “Settlers of Catan,” a resource management game; “Legendary,” a deck-building game; and “Magic the Gathering,” a card trading game. Other games included “Munchkins,” “Stratego,” “Pirate’s Cove,” “Scrabble,” and many more.

San Quentin librarian Gabe Loiederman, the only staff member in attendance, played “Magic the Gathering” with seven residents. “For the purpose we intended, it was a flop, as we were trying to bring together staff and residents, but for the incarcerated community it was a success. Everyone seemed to have [had] a great time,” said Arturo Vazquez, Vice-Chair of Wall Busters, an independent group of incarcerated gamers who aim not just to change CDCR’s perspective of gaming in prisons, but also to use tabletop games as a catalyst to connect gamers and CDCR’s goal of rehabilitation.

Wall Busters Chair Cristan Rooms called games a form of therapy and described the positive effects of gaming he has witnessed. “I’ve seen people who play D&D grow, leave gangs, get educated, and join self-help groups. They open up in the game and then open up outside the game,” he said. Rooms pointed out that besides the benefits of personal development resulting from role-playing games, a variety of games use teamwork to create a spirit of staff-residents amalgamation. “[In D&D] every member

has a role, and that allows for natural cooperation. Not only will staff and residents socialize, they will work together and even engage in a form of therapy together,” Rooms said. Recently, San Quentin held several events that involved staff members and residents, such as the two physical activities of pickleball and basketball. Wall Busters aims to invite staff to engage with residents in less physical and more social activities. Vazquez said tabletop gaming has a distinct social quality and involves getting to know opponents and teammates very well, as opposed to the more impersonal sports activities. “Tabletop games are on a turn-by-turn basis, which gives people time to talk and get to know each other. There’s no moment to talk in the middle of a basketball game.”

Residents have hand-crafted many of the game sets, repurposing pieces from Scrabble or decks of playing cards. Because administrations have frowned upon prison gaming in the past, many game sets remain unavailable for purchase from vendors. Wall Busters hopes to change that. The group would like to hold monthly game events for residents and to hold quarterly game events for both residents and staff. The quarterly events would take place Friday mornings to make them easier for staff to attend. Yanci Dakin, a resident who attended the event, reminisced about other prisons that held similar events. He also noted the benefits he has found in the gaming community. “We don’t turn anyone away. We all stick together and make friends along the way,” Dakin said. “[Gaming] helps people come in and do something with others, to adjust to social environments. [It] helps them grow.” Willy Alarcon contributed to this article.

'BELIEVE MUSIC HEALS'

Sound of music gives residents opportunity to share truth

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

San Quentin’s music community welcomed a new program that seeks to encourage and empower participants to sing their truths. Sponsored by musician and recording artist Essence Goldman, her non-profit organization “Believe Music Heals,” and Jewish chaplain Rabbi Paul Shleffar, 25 residents will put their lived experiences into song form. While learning about the transformative power of music, the performers will record music they wrote in class. “When you write a story in song, it helps you create an opportunity for soul searching and introspection,” Goldman said.

Goldman said that for incarcerated individuals, music plays an integral part in rehabilitation and opens a portal to connecting with their true selves. She believes music not only transforms, but also can improve consciousness and self-awareness. The artist explained how, through introspection and digging through the layers of egoism, performers and audiences could find authenticity in their hearts.

The 16-week program started with self-examination and self-care through meditation and by mastering breathing. Classes begin with a vocal pitch warm-up and a breathing exercise. During the meditations, Goldman guided the cohort through contemplative exercises. She encouraged the group to feel warmth, safety, and connection within a circle of trust. “We have each other’s backs throughout this collaborative process and everybody is equal,” Goldman said. Goldman described the body as an instrumental part to setting one’s intentions within oneself. She instructed the participants on the mechanics of singing, pitch accuracy, dynamics, breath support, basic cords, and strumming. “[Our] goal is to tell stories with words. It’s a feeling, and what does that sound like to you?” Goldman asked. Resident Robert Walthal’s incarceration at San Quentin has inspired him to write music.



Photos by Dante D. Jones // SQNews

“Music is a great unifier the salve of our mind, body, and spirit. It draws us together, no matter where we are from or what we do.”

—Arent Bradt

“You can have all this talent, but not until something inspiring happens in your heart, do you know what God has in store.” He said that he hopes that his voice technique and skills would improve throughout the class. He also imagined that his God-inspired songs, “Wedding Song” and “Feasting At My Wedding” would one day turn into hits. “I have no talent,” Walthal admitted with blunt honesty, “but God has blessed me with some wonderful music and song-writing ability.” Walthal said he remains optimistic that an instrumentally talented performer would hear his songs and would make them a success. He said he would like his songs to endure the test of time. Resident Tam Steve Nguyen said he felt grateful that Goldman has given him a space and the guidance in identifying and processing his emotions through music. “I recognize music is a place for me to process my emotions.” Nguyen said he valued Goldman using her music to develop a nonprofit and felt inspired to do the same. “I did not realize I could use my music to give back, this is something I am interested in

Above: Participants learn to transform their stories into music.
Below: Essence Goldman, musician and producer, instructs the class on singing, pitch accuracy, breathing support, basic chords, and strumming.



doing,” Nguyen said. Throughout the remaining weeks, classwork will focus on skill building of voice technique, the mechanics of singing, instrument playing, and song writing. While discussing key aspects of Goldman’s class, resident Arent Bradt described diverse kinds of voices, from high head voices, to lower throat voices, to chest voices. He improved the quality of his voice through a series of vocal exercises designed to grow range, to develop pitch accuracy, and to improve tone, leading towards building confidence and authentic self-expression. “Understanding the different kinds of voices helps me feel comfortable and makes me a better singer,” Bradt said. Participants will engage in a variety of writing exercises, including free writing, journaling, lyric writing, and group-guided collaborative song writing exercises. Near the end of the class, guest teachers will offer clinics with specialty-level focus. Goldman’s love for music started at an early age. She plays almost every instrument but concentrates on guitar. While frequently traveling as a child, she said her Walkman kept her constant company. Her career led to seven albums with five record labels from 1997 to the present. Recently, Goldman produced an album for a former student who suffered from ALS, a degenerative disease, and she performed as his voice. The endeavor may lead to a film. “Music is a great unifier, the salve of our mind, body, and spirit,” Bradt said. “It draws us together, no matter where we are from or what we do.”

Guitar students of Arts in Corrections rock in SQ concert

By Kevin D. Sawyer
Contributing Writer

Musicians from the organization Bread & Roses and guitar students from Arts in Corrections performed their first concert at San Quentin since the pandemic. An audience of about 40 incarcerated persons and guests attended the Sunday night mid-November concert venue in the Chapel A. Four participants from Kurt Huget’s Thursday afternoon guitar workshop opened the show, playing Tom Petty’s acoustic hit “Free Falling.” The workshop students played ten songs, in a variety of genres, including “The Wind Cries Mary,” by Jimi Hendrix; “Easy,” by The Commodores; and “The Thrill Is Gone,” by B.B. King. Jeff Isom, a workshop participant, played his acoustic guitar but took the lead on electric guitar to play a crowd-pleasing blues solo

on “The Thrill Is Gone.” “It was a joyful experience,” said Levere Callender, a workshop student who plays bass. “The class is helping me dissect music, and make faster chord changes” on the guitar. Callender called “Ramblin’ Man” by the Allman Brothers his favorite song of the evening. “It’s Southern country rock,” he said. “That’s what I like about it.” Julie Harrell, who performed with Bread & Roses, accompanied the workshop students as she played percussion to keep the beat and rhythm moving at an even pace. The workshop students ended their set with “Lean on Me,” by Bill Withers. The audience clapped and sang along, “You just call on me brother, when you need a friend.” “It was everything I hoped for and more,” said Huget. Huget said the show provided a much-needed break from the weekly two-hour

workshop that had not performed live since the pandemic. “It’s fun to play loud.” During the pandemic, Huget had to adjust by preparing lessons to teach students songs and music theory through correspondence. He has taught guitar at San Quentin for nearly 15 years. “Kurt’s (Huget) a great teacher,” said Craig Bartock who came in with Bread & Roses, “and he’s a great friend too. We hang out together.” Bartock plays guitar for the band Heart. Over the years, Huget has brought him into the prison several times for instruction for the workshop students. Huget, Harrell, and guitarist Bartock closed the show. The non-profit’s mantra, “The healing power of music,” gives local artists the ability to play in jails, prisons, retirement homes, hospitals, and more. Huget led the ensemble, seemingly calling out songs at random as Harrell and

Bartock followed. They stepped up when Huget started playing “Little Wing,” by Jimi Hendrix. Bartock knew the song and played along. “I never know what Kurt’s (Huget) going to put on the list,” said Bartock. That did not stop him, though. “We want to come back more,” said Francesca Lee, Bread & Roses show producer. “This is something we want to do regularly.” After the show, the incarcerated musicians and audience members talked to the Bread & Roses guests and musicians, thanking them for coming in to play. “We’ve been fighting to get back in here,” said David Perron, Bread & Roses executive director. He replaced Lisa Starbird, who has retired. By eight o’clock, everyone filed out of the chapel, but the show does not stop. Huget’s other band continues to play Thursday afternoons at three o’clock.

LAW & POLICY



Stock Image

2024 California bills update

The following information was provided to SQNews courtesy of the Ella Baker Center.

These bills were passed by the state legislature and signed by the Governor, making them law. Unless otherwise stated, the following laws go into effect on January 1, 2024.

AB 1226 (Haney) Placement of Incarcerated Persons by Corrections: Requires CDCR to house incarcerated people with minor children as close to their child’s home as possible.

AB 353 (Jones-Sawyer) Incarcerated Person’s Access to Showers: This requires incarcerated persons to be permitted to shower at least every other day. The bill requires that whenever a request for a shower is denied, the facility manager must approve the decision to prohibit an incarcerated person from showering and would require these reasons to be documented

AB 1487 (Santiago) TGI Wellness Reentry Fund: This bill will establish the Transgender, Gender Variant, and intersex Wellness Re-entry Fund (TGI Re-entry Fund), administered by the California Department of Public Health, with funding subject to appropriation. Once funded, the

TGI Re-entry Fund would distribute funding for the development and expansion of community-based transgender, gender variant, and intersex (TGI) reentry programs at TGI serving organizations in critical areas across the state.

AB 1418 (McKinnor) Tenancy: Contact With Law Enforcement or Criminal Convictions: This bill prohibits local governments from enacting “crime-free” housing policies. This bill will prohibit a local government from, among other things, imposing a penalty against a resident, owner, tenant, landlord, or other person as a consequence of contact with a law enforcement agency.

SB 78 (Glazer/Becker) Factual Innocence: Further extends SB 446 – passed in 2021 – to ensure that the two processes in seeking compensation for the wrongfully convicted (either through the Victim’s Compensation Board or the courts) are aligned and not unduly burdensome on the state litigators responding to these claims.

SB 97 (Weiner) Righting Wrongful Convictions Act: This enhances the fairness of the “habeas corpus” process for individuals who have been wrongfully convicted, providing a better opportunity to establish innocence

and have their wrongful convictions overturned. This bill eases the criteria for initiating a habeas petition based on false and new evidence. In cases where a habeas petition leads to retrial, it permits a post-conviction attorney to continue representing their client during retrial. Creates presumption in favor of granting relief for habeas petitions if the prosecutor agrees to the factual or legal basis for relief.

AB 60(Bryan) Restorative Justice Program: Ensures that victims/survivors have a right to be informed of the Restorative Justice options available to them.

AB 1148 (Bonta) Child Support Suspension: Offers formerly incarcerated parents the opportunity to secure employment and some financial security before having to resume child support obligations for formerly incarcerated parents until the 10th month after release.

AB 1104 (Bonta) Corrections and Rehabilitation Sentencing: Changes California’s penal code to make clear that the purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation and preparation for reentry, not punishment.

AB 567 (Ting) Criminal Records Relief: Extends automatic conviction record relief to misdemeanor

convictions where the sentence has been successfully completed following a revocation of probation.

Harmful California Bills that were Signed

SB 14 (Grove) Serious Felonies for Human Trafficking: Includes human trafficking within the definition of a violent felony, including for purposes of the Three Strikes Law. Amended to exclude victims of trafficking from conviction. *This is one of the first to expand Three Strikes in decades.*

AB 701 (Villapudua) Fentanyl enhancement for weight: This bill applied the existing weight enhancement that increases the penalty and fine for trafficking substances containing heroin, cocaine base, and cocaine to fentanyl.

Bills that Did Not Pass (Vetoed or Died in 2023)

SB 81 (Skinner & Becker) Parole Hearings: This bill would have guaranteed a parole candidate who receives a denial the right to appeal via a writ of habeas corpus, instructed the courts to appoint a lawyer for the parole candidate if requested, and instructed the court reviewing the writ of habeas corpus to apply a preponderance of evidence standard to the decision to deny. Vetoed by Governor Newsom.

AB 958 (Santiago) Strengthening Prison Visitation: This would have removed CDCR administrative barriers to strengthen visiting opportunities and connections between incarcerated people and their families and children. It would have allowed visits by family members with past convictions, even when those convictions are decades old, and families to visit incarcerated persons with rule violations that have nothing to do with a violation of visiting rules.

AB 1310 (McKinnor) Recall and Resentencing: Would have authorized a person who, on or before January 1, 2018, suffered a conviction of firearm enhancements to petition the court for resentencing to remove/reduce their enhancement. The bill would also require the court to appoint counsel for a hearing.

Formerly incarcerated who received the right to vote largely failed to use it

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Staff Writer

Though millions of formerly incarcerated persons have regained their right to vote, in at least four states, they largely failed to register and go to the polls, according to the Marshall Project.

The research found that reasons for self-disenfranchisement range from simple unawareness — no one told them that they now have the right to vote — to disbelief, because of the long-standing tradition that felons may not vote. The article said some formerly incarcerated persons feared that voting might compromise their parole and that others thought themselves no longer part of society.

The Marshall Project, a New York City-based anti-incarceration activism organization, compared data patterns of correctional releases with voting eligibility in Kentucky, Iowa, Nevada, and New Jersey from 2016 to 2020. The analysis found that re-enfranchisement resulted in few voters.

“We are non-voters,” said Devyn Roberts, 44, a woman from Kentucky who has not voted for most of her adult life. “They should have told us. There should have been a commercial about this.” The report said that she said had not known about Kentucky’s felony re-enfranchisement and had first heard about it while responding to the Marshall Project’s survey.

The article provided statistics of the four states its survey tracked. On average, the four states achieved a felony re-enfranchise rate of 13.5%.

Only about 31,000 of the 177,000 released persons in Kentucky registered to go to the polls, a rate of 17.5%. Iowa, a state that only recently reversed lifetime felony disenfranchisement, had about 5,000 of its 45,000 formerly incarcerated persons return to the voter rolls, a rate of 11%.

The 8,633 formerly incarcerated Nevadan voters amount to 23% of the 37,000 persons released from prisons from 2009 to 2019, but only to 11% if one includes the 77,000 returning citizens eligible since 2019.

New Jersey has the fewest registrations by reinfranchised persons. Since 2019, only 83 of about 2,000 eligible released persons decided to make their political voice heard, a rate of a mere 4%.

Such fractional involvements by formerly incarcerated persons “reflect more than apathy and political alienation,” the article said. None of the releasing carceral institutions needed to follow any directives to inform their returning citizens of their right to vote. The article said that political organizers “had to dispel the widely-held fear that voting could mean going back to prison.”

Self-disenfranchisement often takes another form. Research showed that the returning citizens who did register to vote did not make the effort go to the polls. The article said that states that had informed released persons about restoration of their voting privileges have a greater turnout, the researchers found. Formerly incarcerated persons have taken leadership roles in registering returning citizens in every state covered by the survey.

Not feeling part of society contributes to a sense of political alienation among formerly incarcerated persons, and such feelings seem among the hardest barriers to overcome, the article said. Robert Pate, a formerly incarcerated Iowan who works with voter registration efforts, said that prison “made them feel like they didn’t have any rights, and it kept a lot of them from wanting or even having the desire to see things change in the community.”

The Marshall Project article said that at least 13 states extended voting rights for convicted felons, but some states make eligibility unclear. To register in Kentucky and Iowa, returning citizens must wait for the end of probation and parole, and despite the new laws, some felony convictions still disqualify released persons from voting.

Roberts, the woman from Kentucky, said that she did not know whether the new criteria applied to her, and more uncertainty arose because one of her convictions happened in neighboring Missouri. “I don’t know if one is OK,” she said. “And if you had more than one? Or if you had it in a different state? I read the description, but that’s why I was like, ‘wait a minute.’”

A website set up by the Kentucky Department of Corrections does not help: some queries about eligibility end with inconclusive results, requiring further investigation.

Post-incarceration voting has wide-reaching potential effects. Political activists count on the post-incarcerated vote to unseat the Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell, an opponent of felony re-enfranchising. Organizers in Nevada want returning citizen to vote in elections for sheriffs and district attorneys.

According to the article, Republicans often oppose felony re-enfranchisement and require payment of any outstanding fines and fees before making possible registration. Many such charges remain beyond the ability of returning citizens to pay. Cumulatively, they range in the billions of dollars — courts in Florida alone have imposed fines of over a \$1 billion in the five years leading up to the period covered in the report.

Whether post-incarcerated voting falls in line with the goals of political organizers remains uncertain, said the article. Returning citizens do not necessarily vote for the parties or candidates that organizers expect. Many formerly incarcerated voters show extensive sympathy for Donald Trump and even views on criminal justice concerns do not necessarily align with efforts to reduce incarceration, the article says.

Campaigns pay attention to likely voters, said David Damore, the chair of the political science department at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The article said that campaign strategists typically neglect areas that have high incarceration rates and so avoid the issue of disenfranchisement. Theoretically, felony re-enfranchisement could mean that formerly incarcerated persons could alter political campaigns. “These voters are up for grabs,” said Damore. “But someone has to think it’s worth the time and effort to track these voters down and get them in the pool.”

'Carveouts' excluded from justice reform

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

Large categories of incarcerated people are being excluded from criminal justice reforms because of their convictions of specified crimes, the *Prison Policy Initiative* reports.

Those who are convicted for serious, violent, and certain drug-related offenses face what is termed carveouts from reforms, the seven-page report states. Reformist policymakers maintain that carveouts are needed to get reform legislation approved.

The report says the argument is stated as: “We have to start reforms with non-violent charges, and we’ll come back for more serious charges later.”

In 2017 Louisiana changed its eligibility of probation, including allowing people to earn credits to shorten their sentences. The state entirely left out people convicted of violence and sex-related offenses.

In 2019 Missouri developed a treatment program for its veterans. People who qualify for the program must be non-violent and not unlawfully possess a firearm.

Specialists believe



Illustration Randy C. Thompson // SQNews

Progressive justice reforms skips many incarcerated persons.

drug-related offenses linked to Fentanyl are a detriment to public health. They say the drug is connected to opioid overdoses. The claim that fentanyl is a hazard to public health is why many incarcerated people are excluded from criminal justice reforms.

People who use or sell drugs do not always know that the drugs contain fentanyl because it is sometimes added by people high up the drug chain. But people convicted of fentanyl crimes are being excluded, asserted the *PPI* report.

Legislators believe that victims of violent crimes prefer violent offenders to remain in jail endlessly, but the data provided by *PPI* says differently.

Only 19% of survivors

want the incarcerated to serve their entire sentence, while 72% show interest in earned credit to shorten their time served.

The data also reveal that survivors show an interest in alternatives to incarceration; 75% of them want people to be held accountable, but with choices outside of prisons/jails, such as restorative justice programs.

More than 70% of crime victims prefer mental health treatment programs compared to incarceration, according to the report.

The District of Columbia developed a resentencing procedure for people under the age of 25 at the time of the crime, regardless of the crime.

ILLINOIS

Illinois first state to combat racial bias by removing cash bail

What factor should determine whether a defendant has to stay in jail? Statistically, Black and Latino men generally pay higher bail than White defendants do, so Illinois set a precedent as the first state in the country to abolish cash bail for non-violent criminal defendants awaiting trial, according to an article by Ebony Curry in *The Michigan Chronicle*.

The Illinois Pretrial Fairness Act, effective as of September 2023, allows most defendants to remain free until their trial. The law excludes anyone charged with offenses involving violence or firearms or a sexual offense.

“Illinois stands at the precipice of monumental change, a harbinger for what could be a fundamental shift in how America’s criminal justice system approaches economic and racial inequality,” quoted the article.

According to the article, the long-standing practice of monetary bail sustained a system of inequity that resulted in an unbalanced arrangement in which affluent defendants could often buy pretrial freedom, while persons of lesser means needed to remain in custody.

Cash bail reform has emerged as one of many issues awaiting reform amid ongoing efforts to redress nationwide racial and economic inequities, noted the article.

“Advocates for justice and equality argue that the existing bail system perpetuates a cycle of inequality, disproportionately impacting low-income communities and people of color,” the article said.

Opponents of Illinois’ new law include members of the community and law enforcement agencies that have concerns about compromising public safety.

“Defendants who don’t post bond have no incentive to return to court,” said Jim Kaitschuk, executive director of the Illinois Sheriff’s Association.

Illinois’ first-in-the-nation move to eliminate cash bail for nonviolent defendants could signal an essential shift in American criminal justice reform, the article said. Other states, such as New Jersey, have also begun instituting cash bail reforms with positive results, according to the article, indicating that this trend may gain momentum.

—William Burley

NEW YORK

Law enforcement students use virtual reality as training tool

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

Students preparing for a law enforcement career in Watertown, New York, have a new classroom educational tool — virtual reality.

In addition to the traditional textbook lessons, high school students enrolled in criminal justice courses in Jefferson and Lewis counties of New York state have a new mechanism of instruction. Wearing virtual reality headsets, students experience firsthand, real-world law enforcement situations without leaving the classroom, reported WWN Channel 7 News.

“It’s definitely realistic and prepares you for the real world. When you go into the academy, not a lot of people can say that they’ve done this.”

—Genoa Wood

The roughly 60 students in the program can experience challenges with simulated stressful circumstances. These range from de-escalating domestic disputes to hostage situations, but in a very controlled environment. The students describe the feeling of immersion in a scenario, of how realistic it appeared, and how dealing with such situations helped to promote the development of appropriate responses, said the report.

Criminal justice instructor Todd Gorman said about his students, “They’re more confident. They get done with that, they run a scenario correct, they de-escalate it, and you can just see the pride in their face. They’re like, I did that, I took care of the situation; everybody was safe, and that’s the outcome we’re looking for.”

NORTH CAROLINA

Study finds rehabilitative benefit of family contact, visits

By Jad Salem
Journalism Guild Writer

A comprehensive study published by Prison Policy Initiative reveals that regular family contact for the incarcerated leads to significant reductions in both in-custody misconduct and recidivism after the person’s release.

The report, “Research Roundup: The Positive Impacts Of Family Contact For Incarcerated People And Their Families,” joins a growing body of evidence on the value of family contact for incarcerated individuals. The author, Leah Wang, compiled data from more than two dozen sources — some going as far back as the 1970s — demonstrating the positive effects of regular contact between the incarcerated and their loved ones.

The data reveals that maintaining frequent contact with family resulted in a 43% lower likelihood of reoffending within the first year of release, compared to those with little to no family contact. Furthermore, recidivism was shown to continue dropping as frequency of contact increased and those with continuous family support were two-thirds more likely to secure stable employment upon reentry.

In-person visiting was also shown to lessen the risk of mental health and substance use problems among children of the incarcerated who had regular contact with their parent.

The study also underscores the pivotal role of technology on facilitating family contact. Thanks to advancements such as video visitation and electronic messaging system, incarcerated individuals can now engage wit their loved ones more regularly, bridging the emotional and psychological divide caused by physical separation.

While shedding light on the positive impact of family contact, the report also highlights the challenges faced by inmates and their families, including the financial cost of contact visits. Addressing these barriers and promoting affordable and equitable communication options remain key to ensuring the well-being and successful rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.

The findings of this study have ignited discussions among policymakers, prison administrators and advocacy groups, spurring the development of policies and programs that prioritize and facilitate family contact to enhance the prospect of successful reintegration into society.

As our society grapples with criminal justice reform, understanding the transformative power of family contact can inform effective policies that promote rehabilitation, reduce recidivism rates and foster stronger, more supportive communities.

1. California — (*Los Angeles Daily News*) An editorial opined that most of the 6,000 Angelenos incarcerated in L.A. county jails do not pose a risk to public safety but simply cannot afford bail. Despite changes to the county’s bail practice, the editors believe that law enforcement and city officials stoked fear that without cash bail, “our communities will see a wave of violence and theft.” Rearrests amounted to only 3.5% during the first three weeks of the new policy, the editorial said.

2. Texas — (*KXAN*, NBC affiliate, Austin) Local nonprofit affiliates, district attorneys, and restorative justice experts gathered to discuss the Travis County Transformation Project, a diversion pilot program that offers alternatives to involvement in the criminal justice system to youth affected by family violence. An official from the DA’s office called the program an opportunity for families that “...feel like they don’t have any other choice but to involve law enforcement because they don’t have what they need to be able to heal this.”

3. Wisconsin — (*Fox6 News*, Digital Team) Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers granted 82 more pardons, making his total 1,111. The state’s constitution gives the governor power to pardon, which restores rights like serving on a jury, holding public office, and holding certain professional licenses. Returned citizens must have completed their sentence five years ago and without pending charges; sex offenders remain excluded. “It continues to be a privilege to hear about individuals’ lives, work, and what they have done to overcome their past mistakes and build positive, rewarding lives for themselves and their families,” Evers said.

4. Illinois — (*Chicago Sun-Times*) The Illinois



NEWS BRIEFS
By BOSTYON JOHNSON
MANAGING EDITOR

Pretrial Fairness Act, which eliminates cash bail, aims to promote diversion during pretrial. With 60% of the population living paycheck-to-paycheck, many criminal defendants must stay in jail because they cannot buy their way out. “Critics have wasted no time seizing upon instances in which released defendants have exhibited high-risk behavior or committed new crimes,” said the article.

5. Michigan — (*Detroit Catholic*) On November 11, 2023, chaplains, law enforcement and formerly incarcerated persons held a symposium to promote restorative justice and to create a system that exhibits compassion to renew

civilization. “Today’s event is in line with our dedication to add a moral voice to the legal profession and to make space for dialogue that keeps human dignity as a central component to pursuing justice,” said University of Detroit Mercy Law School Dean Jelani Jefferson Exum.

6. West Virginia — (*West Virginia Public Broadcasting*) Virginia’s Governor Jim Justice plans to allocate \$4 million in federal funding to improve the criminal justice system and to combat illicit drug use. “These funds will be used to assist state agencies, local governments, private nonprofits agencies to improve the criminal justice system,” said Gov. Justice. Mental health

services, human resources, help for law enforcement to combat illicit substance use will benefit from the funds

7. Washington D.C. — (*Los Angeles Times*) FBI statistics reported a 6% drop in homicides nationwide for 2022. “A 10% decline would be the largest ever recorded,” said crime data analyst Jeff Asher of AH Datalytics. The report includes data from 18,888 local law enforcement departments and sometimes does not reflect cities’ larger drops in comparison to more rural areas.

8. Washington, D.C. — (*Gallup Polls*) Ever since Gallup asked about fair application of the death penalty in 2000, more Americans considered it applied unfairly (50%)

than fairly (47%). In 2023, 52% of Democrats believed capital punishment as applied too often. The poll showed that 62% of Republicans believed the death penalty as applied not often enough. “Capital punishment is legal in 27 U.S. states and in the U.S. nationally, but both death sentences and executions have declined in recent years,” said the report.

9. New York — (*Associated Press*) The nation’s last floating prison has closed in New York. The Vernon C. Bain Correction Center had 100 cells with 800 beds and 16 dorms. Nicknamed “the boat,” it meant to reduce overcrowding of the Rikers Island jail. “I want to see for myself that there will never be

another soul on that boat,” said Lezandre Khadu, a mother of someone housed at the facility whose death resulted from a treatable infection.

10. New York — (*The Davis Vanguard*) Policymakers are leaning more toward reform with policies that aim to increase public safety and reduce punitiveness in the criminal justice system. The Clean Slate Act passed by New York Governor Kathy Hochul seals the records of persons who remain crime-free after incarceration. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, court fines and fees can hold returning citizens “in a cycle of poverty and punishment that can be nearly impossible to escape,” said the article.

ARIZONA

Second Chance Programs

Nonprofit offers coding class for incarcerated in attempt to lower recidivism rates

By Randy Hansen
Journalism Guild Writer

A non-profit organization helps incarcerated people learn coding, giving them a better chance at employment after they are released.

Persevere, a Tennessee-based business, has their coding program in four prisons, in the state of Arizona. The organization works with incarcerated people in four Arizona facilities, teaching computer coding help reduce recidivism rates, according to Axios Phoenix.

A Brookings Institute study that was done in 2018 showed only 55% of ex-prisoners reported any income in their first year of post-release. The median income of that group

was \$10,090 in that year.

Coding education courses, “Second Chance Programs”, qualify graduates for junior web developer jobs that can earn around \$50,000 per year upon release from prison, asserted the story.

In the last four years around 300 people have completed the coding programs. Since 2019 almost 50% of graduates are now employed in the tech industry with another 30% employed in other fields with only a 2% who have re-offended which offsets the state-wide prison recidivism rate of 40%.

“That because many software positions are remote and there is a strong need for people with this skill set, Persevere has found the tech



Courtesy of CoreCivic

industry to be more accepting of employees with criminal records,” said Stephanie Morales, the program’s manager.

Just this year there were eight incarcerated graduates with “full-stack web developer certifications” at the Red Rock Correctional Center in Eloy.

A breakdown on how the program works is as follows:

Teachers, and Persevere staff teach participants in the

program to understand workplace readiness, addressing emotions, physical health and to manage conflicts.

All individuals have a case manager upon completion of the course to help them address any needs or issues during release and in the first year of release. Persevere has a strong focus on helping the ex-prisoners to secure employment and family reunification and

transitional housing.

Michael McGrain, a 2023 coding program graduate at the Red Rock facility; he spent 17 years accessing the prison classes and workshops. He said coding taught him skills that can be used when re-entering society.

“This is the only real opportunity here,” said McGrain.

He has a December release date, McGrain has been

Arizona's Corrections Education Director Abisogun Kokumo speaks to graduates, recognizing them for their hard work in completing the curriculum with a ceremony involving cap and gowns.

practicing mock interviews, and preparing a resume for his job hunt.

Nathaniel Vasquez, who graduated in 2022 and serves as a teaching assistant this year. He said, when he released in 2024, he wants to work with his brother who is a web developer upon.

After losing his freedom five years ago he was lost, but Persevere gave him confidence for a new and better chapter in his life. In the graduate ceremony this year he told the graduates,

“You have the power to write your own code, both in software and in life,” said Vasquez in a graduate ceremony.

NEW YORK

Prison staff escape punishment for violence

By Jose Ramirez
Journalism Guild Writer

A New York state prison system has unsuccessfully dismissed correctional officers accused of abusing incarcerated people or covering up abuse, according to The Marshall Project.

New York prison system has failed to fire prison staff accused of attacking incarcerated people. Groups of officers often collaborate to hide their violent behavior, by falsifying official reports and denying allegations when investigated.

The investigation showed how guards received discipline for misconduct. Through public records requests they gathered documents, which depicted interviews with prisoners, disciplinary records, and official reports. The NY Department of Corrections discipline system exhibits favoritism toward prison guards, asserted Marshall Project’s report.

The New York department of corrections tried to fire officers and supervisors

accused of physical abuse against incarcerated individuals or for covering up misconduct for the past 12 years. There are more than 290 cases statewide and only 10% of those cases resulted in officers’ firing. A majority of officers managed to keep their jobs, with only a few resigning or retiring.

Examples the report found include, the state trying three times in three years to fire a guard who used excessive force; a correctional officer who broke his baton hitting a prisoner 35 times, resulting in the incarcerated individual needing 13 staples to close up the lacerations on his head.

In abuse cases, arbitrators rule in favor of officers three-quarters of the time. Per guard union contract, outside arbitrators make the final decision if the guards are fired. During these hearings arbitrators often stated the state’s evidence is not enough or prisoner’s statements are unconvincing, noted the article.

The Marshall Project found more than 160 lawsuits

resulted in the state paying damages to victims alleging abuse by guards. The state was complying with a court order or settlement in these lawsuits. In 88% of those cases, the department did not try to discipline officers involved, with records showing that some victims were permanently injured or even killed.

According to The Marshall Project, guards retaliated against incarcerated persons who alleged abuse by filing bogus charges of assault and sending them to solitary confinement.

In another excessive force case, due to a death by officers, the state paid an incarcerated person’s family \$5 million. After the incident the agency did not further punish the guards involved.

This investigation reflects a portion of violence inflicted by correctional staff goes unnoticed, because many residents fear of retaliation; the incarcerated people are afraid to file a complaint against staff, according to The Marshall Project.

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Model finds remarkable success

By Jonquil Thomas-Weisner
Journalism Guild Writer

Connecticut has made remarkable progress in curbing crime and incarceration – cutting the number of people incarcerated in half and posting the lowest crime rate in 40 years, *SLATE* reports.

In the late 1990s there were so many people incarcerated in the state of Connecticut, officials ended up paying another state to house 500 people. Now a quarter of a century later, they have to cut their prison population in half, all the while closing 10 prisons, according to the July 27, 2023 story.

The push to reform its criminal justice system began in the early 2000s, the process sped up in 2011 under the then-Gov. Dannel Malloy. The reform was hurried as Democrats became the majority in the state Legislature.

Under this new shift in

“We’ve shown over a 15-year period how to do [criminal justice reform] right. I actually wish other states spent more time looking to Connecticut.”

—Rep. Steve Stafstrom

political power, Connecticut made many changes. Repealing the death penalty, changing the age from 16 to 18 on juveniles who could be tried as adults, and getting rid of a few sentencing guidelines that were geared towards people of color, reported the article.

“We’ve shown over a 15-year period how to do [criminal justice reform] right. I actually wish other states spent more time looking to Connecticut,” said Rep. Steve Stafstrom, a Democrat from Bridgeport, Conn.

The work to reduce the prison population coincided with the decline in crimes being committed between 2012 and 2021. In the state violent crimes were down 43 percent, and property crime was down 29 percent.

Although these declines in the incarcerated individuals are important and significant, Melvin Medina, the vice president of policy and advocacy for the Connecticut Project, feels that the state has not made a dent in racial differences, noted the story.

Connecticut’s Black residents makeup only 12.9% of the state’s population, but 42% of its incarcerated population. This percentage is the same as it was when the state held 20,000 incarcerated people.

Black residents in Connecticut are 9.4 times more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts. This is almost twice the national average and ranked fifth-highest of all states, reported *Slate*.

FLORIDA

Documentary shines light on two-strikes law

A documentary depicts the use of Florida’s two-strike law, sentencing those who are convicted for a repeat offense to life in prison.

Frontline’s documentary program sheds light on the Florida two strikes law, called “Prison Release Reoffender law,” with some of the strictest sentences repeat felony offenders, according to Frontline.

In the documentary a young man was profiled, had a history of petty thefts, which included stealing a drill from a Hardware store.

His name is Mark Jones and within 3 years of his release, he attempted to grab the car keys of 69-year old Eunice Hopkins’s. She screamed driving way during the attempt, while Jones fled the scene.

He was eventually apprehended and offered a 15-year plea deal for attempted carjacking. Jones decided to have a jury trial, the prosecutors decided to invoke a Florida statute two strikes law, reported the article.

“My sentence is life

“My sentence is life without the possibility of parole. So I’m in here till I die.”

—Mark Jones

without the possibility of parole. So I’m in here till I die,” Jones said from prison scene in the documentary.

In Florida, it seems parole is rare occurrences; if a person is released from prison within three years of their release, the two-strike law becomes an option. Florida has legally abolished parole, said article.

Florida has one of the strictest mandatory minimum laws, which increases a prison term for people found guilty of certain repeat offenses – in Jones’ case, life in prison. His fate was sealed when a jury found him guilty.

According to the article, Eunice Hopkins who Jones tried to take her car keys

found out had been sentenced to life without parole; she reached out to the prosecutors and said, “No, This is too much! He’s a young man!”

Jones talks about the Hopkins incident and says, “Anything I say about the severity of my sentence, I don’t mean to minimize the impact. She has every right to, you know, have a normal day. And, uh, so I’m sorry, from the bottom of my heart.”

Thousands of incarcerated people are serving maximum sentences under Florida’s two strikes law.

Jones multiple state and federal appeals on his case were unsuccessful and now more than 10 years later is still in prison trying to make a difference.

“I’m a law clerk at the prison law library. You got a lot of guys in here ... they can’t even write an essay, you know, let alone put a brief together for the district court of appeal, and they need help.” Jones said in the documentary.

—Randy Hansen

INTERNATIONAL

Using monkhood as penance loses relevance

By Carlos Gale
Journalism Guild Writer

After a fire drill in Thailand had resulted in an accident that killed a student, four firefighters deemed responsible for the death attended the victim’s funeral with “shaved heads and dressed in saffron robes, kneeling on the ground with their palms pressed together,” said an article in *TIME*.

In Thailand, the practice of *buat na fai* — temporary monkhood — remains generally accepted as a way of making amends for harmful acts. Over the past few years, though, Thais have turned wary that this method seems a mere remedy for bad behavior that taints the reputation of Buddhism, which repeated scandals have already eroded.

“Traditional Buddhist teaching says that ordination is the greatest merit (which can be transferred to the dead in afterlife), but it cannot absolve one’s sins,” the article said, quoting Katewadee Kulabkaew, a Thai Buddhist scholar who called ordination

“an act of compensation rather than redemption.”

The scholar told *TIME*, “In order to show the society that you are tremendously sorry, caring, or deeply grateful for the deceased, you do your best by making the greatest merit for them.”

Ordination does not necessarily mean forgiveness in the public’s eyes, the article said. Last year, a 21-year-old police officer killed a woman after crashing into her while speeding on his motorcycle. Soon afterward, the officer and his father would attempt to use *buat na fai* to gain atonement, but public anger over reckless driving persisted. After only three days, public sentiment forced the officer to leave the monkhood.

The *Bangkok Post* elaborated, “This attitude does more harm than good to society, as it reinforces a notion that anyone — from individuals to government officials and politicians — can trade away their karmic debt through public displays of contrition yet continue to

repeat those same illegal or immoral acts.”

The respect and honor given to monks in predominantly Buddhist Thailand has diminished in recent years. Most men, at some time in their lives, must briefly serve as monks, but now face more difficulties in gaining respect. Some criminals have used monkhood to stay out of public view, the article said.

“Reports of monks engaging in criminal activity — ranging from money laundering to drug trafficking and even murder — have further eroded public trust,” *TIME* said.

In the case of the four firefighters, most Thais showed sympathy and believe that negligence played a lesser part in the accident. Social media has also shown support and understanding for the firefighters. One person on Facebook went so far as to say, “I would like to congratulate the four people who were ordained for the younger brother,” and added, “I wish [the victim] will rest in a better world.”

SOCIAL JUSTICE & CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM



Clockwise from top left: Pamala Price, Andrew Warren, Joe Gonzales, George Gascón, Monique Worrell, Larry Krasner.

Progressive prosecutors find themselves under fire across U.S.

By Roland C. Cardiel
Journalism Guild Writer

What two characteristics do Andrew Warren, Larry Krasner, Monique Worrell, George Gascón, Joe Gonzales, Pamela Price, and Chesa Boudin have in common? They all belong to a new force of progressivism in criminal prosecution and they all have been in the crosshairs of conservative politicians eager to return their jurisdictions back to a lock-'em-up philosophy.

Voters in San Francisco recalled Boudin in June 2022, while District Attorney Gascón has survived two recall attempts in Los Angeles, in campaigns built on fear-based arguments about crime and disorder, according to an article by Jamiles Lartey of The Marshall Project, a social justice organization based in New York City.

In Alameda County, District Attorney Pamela Price has come under fire after just seven months in office. This makes her the third prosecutor in a major California city that has faced recall, allegedly due to some of her charging decisions in cases that involved violence along with an apparent rise

in some violent crime rates in her jurisdiction.

However, Price said that recall campaigners “refuse to accept the results of a legitimate, democratic election to remove the status quo,” according to the article.

Miriam Krinsky, the executive director of Fair and Just Prosecution, an advocacy group, said, “There’s obviously a feeling by a few of the [Republican] presidential candidates that they can gain some traction by making this into a political wedge issue and going after the so-called ‘woke’ prosecutors.”

Beyond the recalls, conservative leaders have resorted to impeachments, law changes, and suspensions to oust progressive prosecutors, wrote Lartey in the article.

One of the most outspoken critics, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, terminated prosecutor Andrew Warren in January 2023 for allegedly failing to enforce state law. U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle weighed in saying, “[Warren] was diligently and competently performing the job he was elected to perform, very much in the way he told voters he would perform it.”

The article noted that Warren still lost his job as a

Florida court later dismissed Warren’s challenge on a technicality.

DeSantis, a presidential hopeful, also suspended Monique Worrell, the elected prosecutor in the Orlando area, claiming that she failed to enforce state laws. Worrell has vowed to fight the governor’s sanctions but says even a court’s agreement might not make her reinstatement a reality, according to the article.

In Texas, San Antonio prosecutor Joe Gonzales said his office would change policy to comply with a state law that allows a judge to remove from office prosecutors who choose not to pursue specific types of crime. The Texas legislature pushed for the new law in response to prosecutors who would not pursue abortion-related charges.

Earlier this year, conservative Pennsylvania lawmakers tried to impeach Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner. A panel of state court judges concluded that the legislature “simply appears not to approve of the way [Krasner] has chosen to run his office,” noted the article.

Even when prosecutors survive attempts to oust

them, hurdles to progress still remain. Los Angeles County DA Gascón campaigned on curbing excessively long and harsh sentences and said in 2020 that his unit could reduce up to 30,000 sentences in the California prison system. State data, though, indicates that Gascón has accomplished fewer than 100 sentence revisions, partly because his staff is worried that people released early might recidivate and bring scrutiny on the office, according to the article.

Most states cannot consider resentencing unless a prosecutor can prove an error in the original term, the story reported. Resentencing units, however, have powers to consider more kinds of cases. More states are granting prosecutors broader powers to initiate resentencing, including Minnesota this summer, the article pointed out.

An actual or apparent rise in crime rates serves as the usual pretext to attempt to remove progressive prosecutors, the article wrote. Alameda DA Price’s supporters counter that the factors driving fluctuations in crime are complex and beyond the control of any one single public official.

UNION BOSS BACKS CALIFORNIA MODEL

CCPOA VP witnesses firsthand the benefits of Norway model

By Anthony Manuel
Carvalho
Staff Writers

In September, about a dozen members of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association visited prisons in Norway to observe the Norway model, reported the *Los Angeles Times*.

The tour included California corrections officer Steve “Bull” Durham. He focused not on the demeanor of the prisoners or the pristine grounds, but on the level of comfort and contentment among the Norway’s correctional staff. It had impressed him, said the article.

Durham, a CCPOA vice president, stated, “Corrections officers in California are literally sick and tired from being cogs in a machine that doesn’t work — for our society, for incarcerated persons, or for guards who want a career that doesn’t kill them.”

Durham said the attitudes and mindset of the Norwegian officers appeared not only healthier, but in terms of interaction between residents and officers, far more casual.

“It’s radical,” said Durham, about turning guards into at least part-time social workers.

A corrections officer for 25 years, Durham spent most of his career in the desolate enclaves of Tehachapi State Prison. He and other CCPOA representatives discovered benefits of the Norway Model that had remained unclear to the union before Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the implementation of his vision of rehabilitation, known as the California Model.

The California model might not only improve the overall welfare of correctional officers but also has the potential of saving jobs slated for elimination by looming prison closures.

The Norway model requires prisons to develop a “more humane and more normalized” culture.

“We are tired of seeing our partners in a casket. The stuff we see is not good” Durham said. “It comes down to the mental health and well-being of our staff. We have to try to change.”

The article noted that the occupation’s psychological stress leads to a life expectancy at least 15 years below the national average, with heart attacks and a suicide rate of 39%, far higher than the rest of the working population, according to the Vera Institute of Justice.

After Norway’s adoption of its current model, rates of re-offending had fallen from 70% to 20%, the lowest recidivism rate in the world, according to the *LA Times*.

The *Times* reported that 45% of California’s released incarcerated residents commit new crimes within three years and about 20% return to prison.

The CCPOA has supported Gov. Newsom California Model. The union support might astonish voters, for public opinion might swing to increased incarceration, said the article.

Since Norway’s adoption of its current model, rates of re-offending had fallen from 70% to 20%, the lowest recidivism rate in the world.

—LA Times reported

Currently, the American prison philosophy of static security, which includes lockdowns, cell extractions, mace and rubber bullets, can change to Norway’s dynamic security, which provides an environment of respect and dignity for all individuals, said the article.

Conversely, Norwegian officers rely on interpersonal relationships between officers and residents to maintain institutional control.

Norway believes a safer, more productive environment allows correctional officers to support rehabilitation while increasing the quality of their lives, and improving their longevity as well.

In Norway, correctional officers have responsibility for facilitating every program, which creates mutual respect and trust with the incarcerated population.

The vice president of the CCPOA notes that the current incarceration system does not give prison residents self-sufficiency as they learn rehabilitative techniques.

The U.S. prisons do not teach life lessons whereas Norwegian prisons give incarcerated persons the ability to function in life, said Durham.

He added that U.S. officers have to gain the trust of the incarcerated population to act as their mentors.

Also Durham admitted that the majority of California officers doubt that the California model would work and that many of them might oppose the concept.

San Quentin correctional officer T. Thomas, who had joined the tour of the Norway prison, told the *Times* that implementing the California Model “seems realistic.”

“We do a lot of this already. We just didn’t have the words to put to it,” said Thomas.

Regardless of budget deficits and impending prison closures, the California Model would require additional correctional officers, said the article.

Officer Thomas observed the Norwegian guards as having accountability for a few dozen incarcerated persons, while she has had charge of up to 200. In most prisons, incarcerated persons frequently outnumber guards. To maintain safety, guard depended on relationships they have developed with prison residents.

Newsom has mandated rehabilitation that would establish opportunities for incarcerated persons to increase public safety in the communities to which they return.

Preventive efforts found to lower crime rates

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

An 18-month-long law enforcement collaboration with community programs resulted in a drop in serious and violent crime rates.

Sacramento Police Chief Kathy Lester declared a new approach to violent crime prevention by collaborating with community groups, according to a story by Rosalio Ahumada in Sacto 911.

Following this announcement, the City Manager repositioned to the police chief the oversight of the Office of Violence Prevention. The repositioning gave the chief control of funding for community organizations that work with the office.

“When we talk about collaboration, she gave us the resources to serve the people in those specific areas. We were able to go out and build relationships. We were able to go out and help people help themselves,” said Mervin Brookins, founder of the community organization Brother 2 Brother.

The City of Sacramento reported an overall 18% drop in crime between January and September of 2022, including a 40% decrease in homicides and an equal 40% drop in rape cases. Compared to the

first nine months of 2022, aggravated assaults fell by 21% and robberies by 6.1%, stated in the article.

The strategy set out to work side-by-side with community organizations that would focus intercession and deterrence services on the sources of criminal behavior, like poverty, and abuse of drugs and alcohol.

The article said the police chief did not want to have a large police presence in communities, but wanted to concentrate on small clusters of persons responsible for criminal behavior. The strategy put emphasis on crime prevention, particularly in areas most impacted.

Concentrating on hotspots of violence, the strategy identified the most violent parts in a seven-square-mile area, which included Del Paso Heights, Oak Park, and North Laguna, noted the story.

The chief chose organizations that “have a history of success and experience building partnerships” and “a proven track record to do this type of work,” said the article.

The announcement received disapproval from the City Council and community groups not chosen to receive funding, the article said, but “the Police Department’s strategy appears to be



Sacramento Police Chief Kathy Lester

working.” The Sacramento City Council appropriated \$3.2 million in funding for community organizations motivated to prevent violent crimes, like Brookins’ group Brother 2 Brother.

Brookins said he and many others at first did not understand Lester’s data-driven approach to policing, calling the plan “kind of sketchy.” He later learned that the approach meant that community groups and police had to work together.

Officers who see distressed

youth now may inform a community intervention group for help without having to resort to juvenile detention, according to Sacto 911.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg praised the collaboration of law enforcement and community organizations. “You see it every single time we have a tragedy or troubled times in Sacramento,” Steinberg told reporters. “We gather here like this in the bad times and in the difficult times, and people support one another.”

DEATH ROW

SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

From 42 years on Death Row to SQ's Earned Living Unit

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

A formerly condemned incarcerated individual is alive and thriving in San Quentin State Prison’s main-line population. After serving 42 years on death row, Marvin Walker, a.k.a. “Shaka,” is currently residing in one of SQ’s Earned Living Units. This specialized housing is reserved for residents who have demonstrated exceptional programming and behavior.

Walker, 64, was born in Los Angeles as the sixth of ten children, and was raised in poverty in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Walker’s parents separated when he was 10. His teenage summers were spent with his aunt in the small farming community of Tulare, California. There, Walker worked with his father and uncle in the recycling business.

He dropped out of school in the tenth grade and got into the drug scene. “During my teen years, I started stealing everything that wasn’t nailed down,” he remembered, due to family poverty.

“One night mom came home and said there was no food. We kids picked walnuts in a local grove and ate them for dinner in front of the fireplace,” he lamented. “Mom was crying and promised that there would never be a time again when

“Mom was crying and promised that there would never be a time again when there was no food. I promised myself that mom would never cry again because she couldn’t feed us. I would steal to buy food and help support the family.”

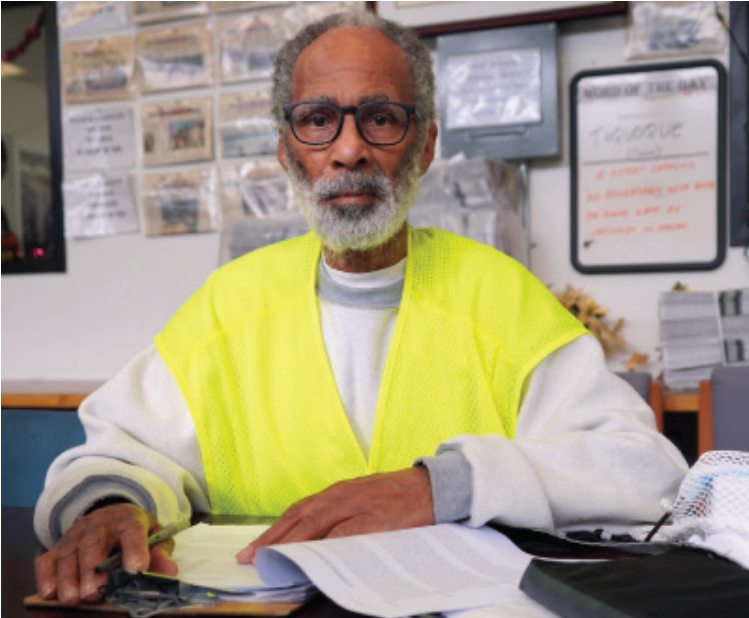
—Marvin Walker

there was no food. I promised myself that mom would never cry again because she couldn’t feed us. I would steal to buy food and help support the family.”

Walker committed a string of robberies over the next several years. He was still a teenager when one robbery went bad, ending in the killing of a young man. Walker had previous arrests, but this one led to prison and the death penalty.

Sitting alone in a cell on death row, Walker felt like he was in “no man’s land,” knowing what he left behind but unsure about what the future held. “I was angry and bitter because I thought I didn’t get a fair trial, and that I was the latest victim of a kangaroo court,” he said.

“It was rough for me because I was raised in a house full of love.



Dao Ong // SQNews

Marvin Walker sitting inside the SQ newsroom.

Then I had to come here in a place surrounded by hate.”

The repetitious days on Death Row seemed endless. Positive programming was minimal because of limited space. The day’s highlight was going to one of six small, caged-in yards with about 70 other people.

The yard was sometimes offered in the mornings if it wasn’t locked down. “Yard was chaos,” Walker recalled. He always wondered if there was going to be an “incident,” expecting the worst but hoping for the best.

Shower time came after the yard, which took place in one of two single showers per tier. However,

these were only offered every other morning. After 2 p.m., Walker was locked in a cell until the next day.

Other activities were limited. Sometimes he could play cards or dominos on benches on the tier with other residents. In his cell, Walker could watch TV or listen to his radio.

“Three brothers [on the tier] and I were the four musketeers,” he said. “We looked out for each other and became an extended family.”

Initially, Walker felt like had no reason to be good, since he was on Death Row fighting for his life. Eventually though, he decided to make amends.

“I was blessed to have people

DEATH & PEOPLE: Death Row minister believes in becoming a better friend while serving the condemned

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

Death Row minister Chitoka Webb finds comfort and ease in life experiences, through religious leadership, and health.

Webb, 48, is a Presbyterian minister and chaplain intern who volunteers on California’s Death Row. She frequently has thoughts about life and death in her capacity as non-judgmental minister, according to the *Marin Independent Journal*.

In 2005 Webb lost her eyesight for about six months due to Behcet’s disease. Webb mentioned that one day while at work she looked down at her computer keyboard and then looked up as someone entered the room, and she could not see them.

“God, I can’t do this,” said Webb, but she remembered God telling her, she can do this.

She believes she has become a “better friend of death by becoming a better friend to people.”

In the report, Webb noted that if you looked at her, you could not tell what she has been through. She faced another challenge when she was diagnosed with end-stage liver disease. Today, Webb awaits a liver transplant.

Webb told the *IJ* she been involved with the Nashville Juvenile Justice

“I become a better friend of death by becoming a better friend to people.”

— Chitoka Webb

Center but had never worked with people sentenced to death. Ministering to those on Death Row has been an experience where she has learned compassion. Webb also said that if you want to change anything, you must get involved.

She received a letter from a person incarcerated on Death Row. He told her he had received additional time on the exercise yard, which resulted in blisters on his feet.

He wrote to her, “... having blisters on my feet is a good problem to have.” Webb was moved through compassion by this man’s words.

The minister says her belief has always been a part of her life; faith appears not when she wants it to, but when she needs it. “Faith has not failed me yet,” she said.

Webb wrote a memoir entitled “Something Inside of Me: How to Hang On To Heaven When You’re Going Through Hell.” In the memoir Webb shares a life of growing up in Nashville, Tennessee, where she lived in poverty.

Webb moved to Marin City from Iowa three years ago to further her education by obtaining a Master’s Degree of divinity at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, which she received earlier this year.

Her studies at Shaw Chaplaincy Institute have her spending time at Christ Presbyterian Church in Terra Linda, at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Marin City, and as a counselor for the San Francisco Night Ministry, reported the article.

Webb said that she did not always care for ministers because of the examples she saw. Therefore, early on she deterred from becoming a minister. She said that she disliked how people were told that certain people will go to heaven while others will not.

Before going to seminary school, Webb became a successful businesswoman and was given a book deal, along with a tour. But she could no longer run from her calling of becoming a preacher.

Webb also said that her motivation to help people was deepened by her experience of facing her own death. A person halts their visualization of life through their own eyes by learning to notice things through other’s eyes. A different lens enables a person to view life differently, she said.

Untested method set for use in execution draws concern

By Jason Satterfield
Journalism Guild Writer

Alabama wants to use nitrogen to carry out its death sentences. The law would make Alabama the first state to use nitrogen hypoxia as a method of execution. Oklahoma and Mississippi legalized nitrogen hypoxia, but have yet to implement the method, according to a report by WHIO-TV News.

“No state in the country has executed a person using nitrogen hypoxia and Alabama is in no position to experiment with a completely unproven and unused method for executing someone,” said Angie Setzer, senior attorney with Equal Justice Initiative.

The nitrogen method of execution theoretically would carry out a death sentence without pain because nitrogen makes up 78% of the air that humans inhale, stated the report. Opponents of the method have related it to human experimentation.

After several failures of intravenous execution over a two-month span, Alabama opted for nitrogen hypoxia for the execution of Kenneth Eugene Smith, 58, convicted for a murder-for-hire in

in my life that cared about me. I wanted to honor those blessings by striving to be a better person. I started in my heart and in my head.”

Walker did not lose hope. “I never felt that I would be executed because of two dreams I had at county jail,” he explained. He and his stepfather were together in jail with no bail. One night he dreamt he saw his stepfather in the court audience wearing street clothes. The next day all charges against his stepfather were dropped. That night, he dreamt that he was in a prison surrounded by water [SQ]. Walker was taken to court, and a judge released him.

His dreams were prophetic. Four decades later, Walker is no longer a “condemned person.”

The court ruled that Walker’s conviction was unconstitutional and that he did not get a fair trial because three Black jurors were dismissed unlawfully. However, for political reasons, the district attorney decided to retry the case. Walker took a plea deal for life with the possibility of parole, being eligible for parole in six months.

When asked what it felt like to get off Death Row he replied, “I’m still coming to terms, still trying to adjust to the possibility of going home. I don’t want to be too high on the possibility, because I’ve been down that road before.”

In regards to his future plans, Walker said, “I’ve learned that planning is wishful thinking. Somebody once said that the best way to make God laugh is to tell him your plans. God has a plan for me and all of us. I am ready to do my part in it.”

“No state in the country has executed a person using nitrogen hypoxia and Alabama is in no position to experiment with a completely unproven and unused method for executing someone.”

Angie Setzer

1998. Smith, among other incarcerated persons sentenced to death in Alabama, seeks to die by nitrogen hypoxia rather than by lethal injection.

“It is a travesty that Kenneth Smith has been able to avoid his death sentence for nearly 35 years after being convicted for a heinous murder-for-hire slaying of an innocent woman,” said Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall in a statement.

Corrections Commissioner John Hamm said in a statement that a protocol for nitrogen hypoxia execution would soon finalize.

By Roland C. Cardiel
Journalism Guild Writer

Capital punishment and the imposition of new condemned sentences hit a new low nationwide in 2023, according to the *National Reporter*.

The Death Penalty Information Center reported a 20-year low that has criminal justice experts rethinking the effectiveness of the death sentence.

“The data shows that most Americans have rejected the death penalty as an expensive, unfair, and ineffective public policy,” said Robin M. Maher, DPIC’s executive director. “These numbers show that most Americans do not believe the death penalty will make them safer or deter future crime.”

The *National Reporter* noted a recent Gallup survey, which found that 50% of Americans considered capital punishment applied unfairly, while 47% believe it applied fairly. Only 53% of Americans supported the death penalty — the lowest

DEATH PENALTY CASES AND EXECUTIONS AT RECORD LOW

percentage since 1972 — according to Gallup.

The report said that 2023 marked the ninth consecutive year with fewer than 30 executions and fewer than 50 persons newly condemned. Five states carried out 24 executions in 2023 and seven states sentenced 21 persons to death. Executions have halted in 29 states by executive action or by abolishment of the practice.

Court appeals add to the high costs of carrying out executions, said the article. Taxpayers can spend an average of approximately \$700,000 more for a capital punishment case. Legal challenges to execution methods and skepticism about racial discrimination have created a decline in the call for the death penalty nationally.

“States are struggling to figure out ways to execute people and it’s part of this larger trend,” said Jeff

Kirchmeier, author and law professor at City University of New York School of Law. He said the death penalty has roots in lynching enslaved Black Americans “as a racist mechanism.”

“There’s no argument of a real benefit to having the death penalty,” Kirchmeier told the *National Reporter*. “It makes [the public] feel better, but most studies show that it doesn’t save lives.”

Critics highlight inaccurate DNA evidence that have resulted in unjust fatal outcomes, the article said. A 2019 report by the National Registry of Exonerations noted that wrongful convictions amount to between 2% and 10%. Some legal experts call the number far too high to justify capital punishment for anyone.

“DNA evidence has made us realize that we make more mistakes on actual innocence than we ever thought we did,” said Maria T. Kolar,

an assistant professor at the Oklahoma City University School of Law.

President Joe Biden vowed to abolish capital punishment during his 2019 presidential campaign. His 2020 campaign website promised to “eliminate the death penalty at the federal level, and incentivize states to follow the federal government’s example,” stated the *National Reporter*, but advocates said Biden had not done enough.

The Department of Justice imposed a moratorium on federal executions in 2021, the article said, and has not asked for new death penalty prosecutions, except in the case of the Boston Marathon bomber.

According to the article, Kirchmeier noted that states have a lot of leeway in the way they run their justice systems, as long as they abide by the U.S. Constitution. He added that the federal government has

the power to abolish only the federal death penalty.

“There are cases right now ... that we have people on death row who don’t deserve the death penalty,” told death penalty advocate GOP Rep. Kevin McDugle to the *Associated Press*.

Opponents of the death penalty believe the U.S. Supreme Court would not abolish the practice but would approve of the decline of executions. They understand that most jurisdictions do not want to lose that option, the article said.

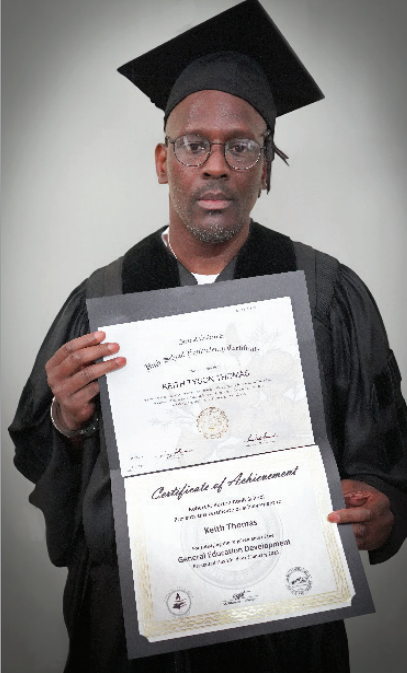
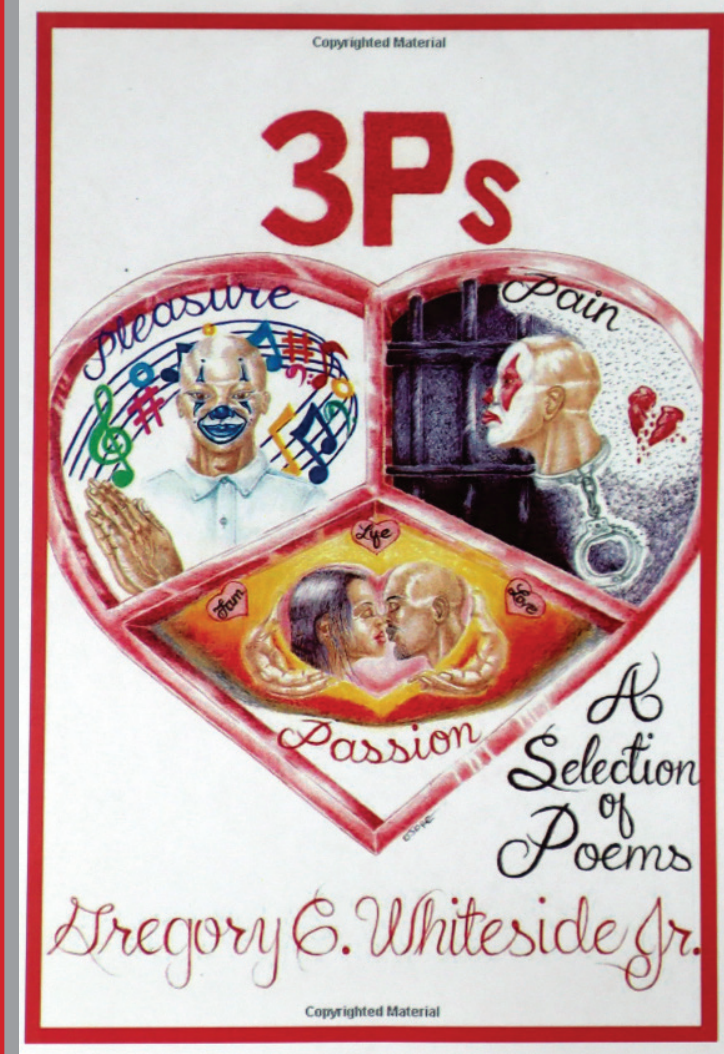
Angie Setzer, an attorney for the Equal Justice Initiative, called the practice “arbitrary and racially biased.” She told the *National Reporter*, “The decline of both death sentencing rates and execution rates reflects a general fatigue about the death penalty as a serious component to public safety.”

CONDEMNED ROW

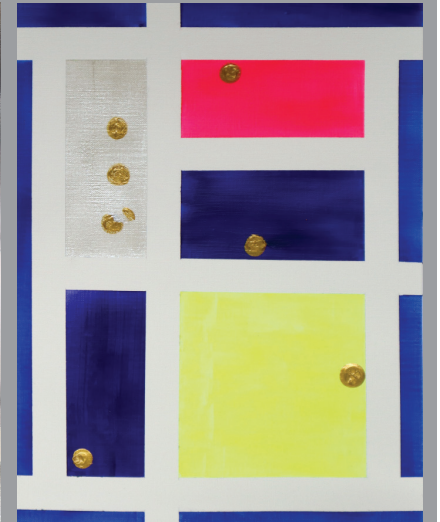
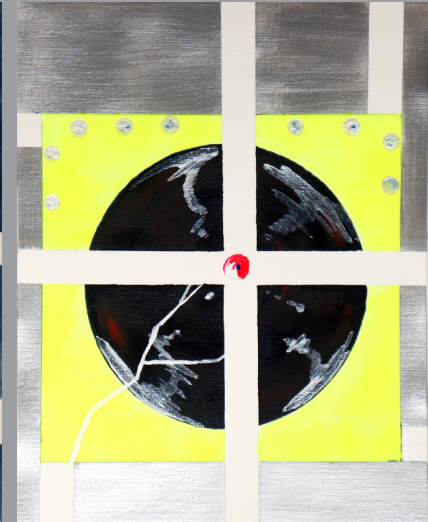
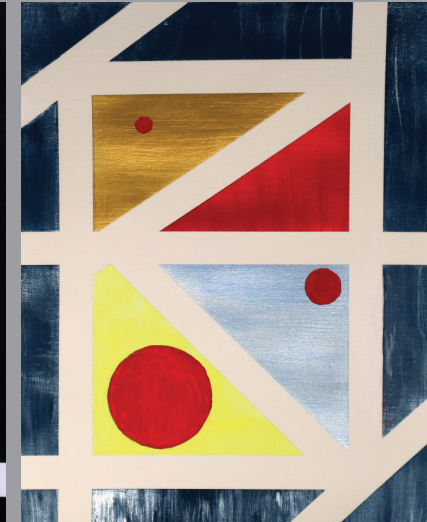
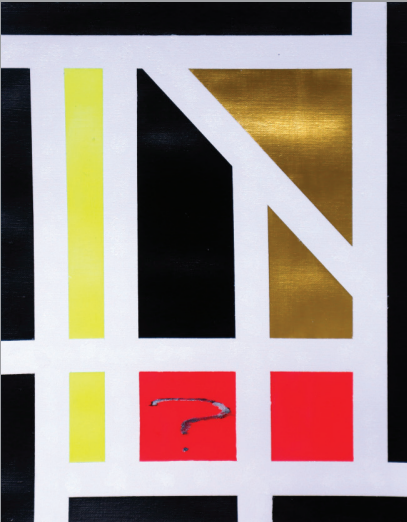
"Life is full of ups and downs, but I've found that in life you get what you give."
— Gregory Whiteside

"Our Only Hope"

I'm trying to make it up to Heaven one day.
That's why I always read your word and never cease to pray.
So I've turned over a new leaf and changed my sinful way.
Hoping you hear my prayers and the sincerity in what I say.
They say to make it you've got to believe and repent.
So I believe and repent hoping God sees how much time I've spent
On my knees so long that my reality's bent
Because I know my soul's priceless, beyond dollars and cents.
So when my number's called I hope that I'm ready
Because the Specter of Death weighs on my mind so heavy
And at the crossroads of Heaven and Hel- who let me?
I hope it's my savior and I make it into heaven- If He lets me.
It weighs heavy on my mind because nothing seems certain
Except life and death, right and wrong. What feels good and what's hurtin'.
So pick your poison behind number one or two curtain
Because in the end it's either God or the Devil that you're servin'.
And that's the realist thing I ever wrote
And that's the truest thing I ever spoke.
Because in a world filled with the Devil's deceitful smoke
God's love is really our only hope, our only hope.



► My name is Keith Thomas and this is what I know. I've been gone 31 years. It's easy to be mad about being in prison, but it also feels good to come to the understanding that, I am not my situation and my circumstances don't make me. Living through experiences helps me become the change I would like to see. My growth is a representation of the community that helped foster it. Thank you San Quentin!



"Celebrating Death With You"

"Over the years art has been therapeutic for me but it has also served to show me what patience really is. It has advance my creativity and expanded my mind to see things in different ways. I create art for my own enjoyment and self-expression but i also bring others visions to life through family protraits and special art request."

— Leonardo A. Cisneros



"Open sky with breeze so nice, my path not clear for my flight. Chose a road rocky as hell, keep on roving when light has fell." — Charles Stevens

REDEMPTION

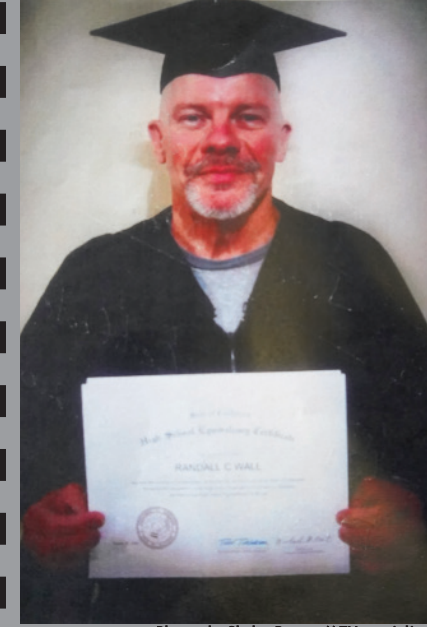
NOT WHAT MANY PROCLAIM

It's implied that we're worthless because of where we reside. Some even claim we have no redemptive value living anywhere inside. Others fail to see they are one decision away from possibly being in similar situations we face today. The more rocks thrown, the more their souls must buy. Glass houses are shattered at an all-time high.
We're the bad guys. In every scenario people turn their backs while making assessments; most times without appropriate facts. I'm not implying none of us put ourselves in position to be blamed; just that not all of us are the monsters many proclaim.

WORTHY OF REDEMPTION

I've hurt a lot of people with my stupidity over countless years. Allowed those closest to me to shed undue and unwanted tears. I'm stepping up to become a more unselfish me. I'm fed up with being a lesser version of me. To walk the walk that mimics my talk is my intent. I aim to be worth every emotional consideration spent.
Striving to shake my disappointments, becoming a source of pride. Being all the positive things that have always lived inside. It's time for me to reverse course and go that extra mile. Proving I'm worthy of redemption and every smile.

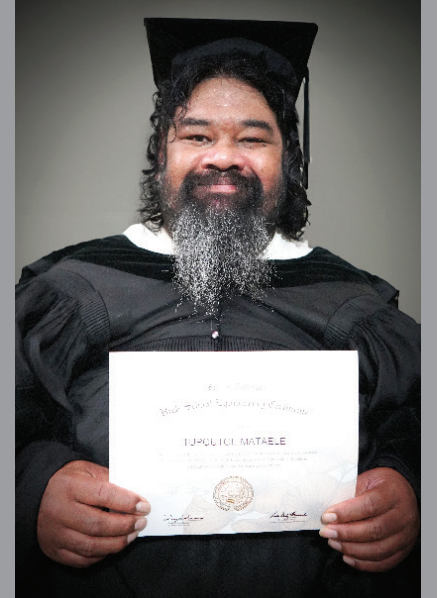
— Anthony Cain



Photos by Skylar Brown // TV specialist

► I obtained my High School Equivalency Certificate from the State of California, in San Quentin State Prison in 2009, and was never provided recognition for my accomplishment.
Since, I am not wealthy, nor is my family, I had no choice but to end my endeavor of a formal education. However, I didn't let that deter me from trying to better myself while incarcerated.
I made contact with the Church of Latter-Day Saints and started doing religious studies on the Gospel of Christ. I have completed a dozen courses in which I have earned certificates and various other LDS doctrinal studies.
Throughout the years I have taken up crocheting, I hold the Executive Secretary Position for the East Block Advisory Council, and the recently provided Edovo Content on the CTL tablets has provided various self-help courses and educational tools.
I can honestly say I am not that same person who was arrested in 1992, and "Yes, people can and do change!" If I could tell the younger generations something; "Stay in school and be productive in life. Education can be difficult at times, and even overbearing and intimidating but in the end, it will come in handy for your future regardless of what happens in your life."

— Randall C. Wall



EDUCATION

UC Berkeley students leave their mark on SQNews journalism

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Staff Writer

Some visitors come to San Quentin to satisfy their curiosity, some come because they want to contribute to social justice, and some come because they feel inspired by hard work that goes into the production of a newspaper. Every Sunday afternoon, the newsroom of the *San Quentin News* hosts a cadre of students from the University of California, Berkeley. They volunteer their journalistic talents to help with editing and to research stories. The UC-SQ relationship goes back more than 10 years.

In March 2013, at the inception of the class, then-editor-in-chief Arnulfo T. Garcia wrote that the *San Quentin News* has “created a partnership with the University of California at Berkeley, where Professor William Drummond gives us further assistance by bringing in journalism students to help with story ideas, editing, and research. The students receive university units toward their degrees for their work. Their presence in this prison also exposes them to our environment, and basically we learn from each other.”

Slightly more than ten years later, Drummond, a long-time figure in academics and in American journalism, continues bringing in his students. “No precedent existed for such a class,” Drummond, 79, said about his class at the prison.

“The class is not based on a course of study. My students learn in the field, much like social work,” Drummond said. “Taught at graduate 200 level, this class gives us much wider latitude in the approach we take in teaching, like including undergraduates, and it has much less



Dante D. Jones // SQNews

Professor Drummond, at center, poses with his students, SQNews staff, and non-staff guest Jesse Milo.

structure than other classes. We call it ‘service learning,’ which means that it has an experiential curriculum not necessarily based on a specific syllabus.”

The three-credit class consisted of 15 students for the fall 2023 semester.

Rae, an undergraduate with a major in urban studies and a minor in journalism, works for the *Daily Cal* on the police beat, which she called “a fun, light little subject.” She said editing the *San Quentin News* gives her an alternate perspective on incarceration. The San Francisco Bay Area native said she had never before gone inside the prison, and found the class “an opportunity that she could not pass up.”

Annie, a Cal senior, majors in American history and women’s studies. She said that she deeply cares

about journalism and had long-wanted to experience working in a real newsroom. She said she thinks of mass incarceration as an injustice and believes that her editing work gives her an opportunity to learn firsthand about the intricacies of the criminal justice system.

A Seattle native, she said she plans to attend graduate school in journalism at Stanford, or better yet, in Paris: she speaks French fluently. “I like you guys,” Annie said, “the managing editor ‘seems so determined.’” She added that she appreciated hard work and that she admired the sense of community in the newsroom.

“More prisons should have something like this,” said Lucy M., a junior anthropology major from Southern California. An incarcerated family member who took

a writing class in prison inspired her advocacy for “the right to write.” She called editing the *San Quentin News* a “cool experience to work in a very polished newsroom with multiple layers of editing in AP style.”

Second-year journalism graduate student Grace came to Berkeley specifically because of the San Quentin program. She grew up in Levittown, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Ole’ Miss with a print editorial journalism degree. She has an extraordinary command of historical facts, and excellent attention to detail.

Grace said she has a philosophy deeply grounded in principles of truth, fairness, and social justice. Possessing extraordinarily high energy, she tackles written English with unreserved certainty about her competence. One

of Grace’s long-term goals includes training writers for community journalism and launching publications like the *San Quentin News* in communities around the country.

Clara, an English major, has visited San Quentin only a few times this semester. She said she has lived in the Bay Area her whole life and never knew anything about San Quentin beyond its name. Clara said she likes to read Jane Austen but feels overwhelmed with too much obligatory reading for school. She said she liked the look of the newsroom; it reminded her of the Berkeley student paper.

Niko, who had recently graduated from Cal in wild-life ecology and conservation with a minor in journalism, finds himself fascinated by the intersection of science

and journalism. He works as a photographer and writer for *Caravan Travel & Style*, a student-run magazine at UC-Berkeley. He said Professor Drummond asked him to join the class to give him an avenue for creativity. Niko said he wants to continue his education toward a PhD in evolutionary biology, probably in the United Kingdom. Niko said he feels passionate about the San Quentin project and about restorative justice.

Tarini, a second-year journalism student from India, said San Quentin was the one class she felt compelled to take before graduation. Studying with Professor Drummond made her believe in the power of journalism to change the world. She considers the *San Quentin News* an “incredible initiative,” and shared that the paper made her feel “double, triple, and quadruple-inspired.” After graduating in May, she hopes to report in the United States for a few years and then report in India. She said she “feels honored to come here” and that “the world needs to know about *San Quentin News*.”

For Professor Drummond, the class has come full circle. “In the past, the class had mostly very young students. Graduate students all wanted to know specific stuff that would help them to get jobs, but after a while, the buzz started to call this a cool class and graduate students applied,” About his current class, Drummond said “this crowd seems very young with mostly undergraduates and two graduate students.

Asked about the future of the class, Drummond said, “I will be on sabbatical until September 2024, but I will still bring in students who want to work in the newsroom.”

Mount Tamalpais College builds trust with prison through town hall meeting

By Michael Callahan,
Staff Writer
and Bostyon Johnson,
Managing Editor

During a September meeting in the MTC education building, 15 residents brainstormed with CDCR personnel and MTC staffers about ways to bridge the lines of communication. Jamgochian posed a question of what MTC could look like if it brought San Quentin custody staff more closely into the picture.

“Not everyone believes in this model, so we need to have staff that is going to believe and back you all up,” said San Quentin resident and MTC alumnus Rodney Baylis.

For Levin, this meeting signified an important step in fostering mutually respectful relationships between incarcerated persons and corrections officers. He said he hoped to see more meetings of this type as San Quentin transforms into the California Model. “While there were certainly some reservations among those in attendance, I felt the dialogue that resulted was open and honest,” Levin said. “[It] represented a forward-thinking approach in which all of us here at San Quentin, whether in green or blue, have a vested interest in building a more unified community.”

Jamgochian asked each group to come up with four



Aristeo Sampablo // SQNews

Residents sat with prison and MTC staff to open lines of communication.

solutions that include staff and incarcerated persons coming together under one umbrella.

Some solutions originated from joint participation of staff and students and included holding collective training, fostering collaborations, and opening classes to correctional staff.

One group said that staff brings new life experiences and should participate as guests in classes with incarcerated students. Another group cautioned that staff

members often do not know anything about MTC.

Other discussions concerned unlock times that affect students’ ability to arrive at classes punctually. One participant talked about the Spanish community and the need for more availability of classes conducted in Spanish.

Captain Torres attended the meeting and noted the outcome of attendees and ideas generated.

“It was nice to see the collaboration between the staff

and residents,” said Captain Torres.

San Quentin’s Mount Tamalpais College held two town hall-style meetings months later to discuss ways to strengthen their communication with correctional staff and incarcerated students.

Never before at San Quentin had college students, staff, and CDCR administration all come together for a discussion across all levels.

“We are a student-centered college and we want to mean that,” MTC’s Coordinating

“As Mt Tam continues to grow and evolve, I feel these town meetings offer me an opportunity to stay actively engaged with the college, and to have a voice.”

—John Levin

Director Amy Jamgochian said. “We ask ourselves what our purpose is and how it serves our students.”

MTC aimed to update students about new policies, transfer-pathways to outside colleges, and new extracurricular courses that will be offered in the spring semester. Students had an opportunity to express their thoughts, concerns, or questions.

Resident John Levin shared his appreciation for Mt. Tam’s transparency, communication, and willingness to foster a sense of community for its current and former students. “As Mount Tam continues to grow and evolve, I feel these town meetings offer me an opportunity to stay actively engaged with the college, and to have a voice,” Levin said.

“We are reviewing policies while talking to other colleges about transfer-pathways,” Jamgochian said. As of right now, MTC students cannot seamlessly transfer to a state university system.

Currently, MTC offers a two-year liberal arts AA

degree, and seeks to add majors in law, and in public policy and other subjects.

MTC also wants to distinguish itself by offering an AA degree for transfer. It is creating a program to work with public community colleges so that the work accomplished at MTC would guarantee a spot for students at state schools.

Another positive change for the future would let incarcerated residents take advanced placement assessments for Math and English, thus allowing them to test out of prerequisites.

Nandita Dinesh, Dean of Academic Administration for MTC, encouraged forward-thinking students to join a one-credit elective workshop in the spring. The courses aim to teach students how to design and facilitate classes themselves.

“We want an equitable way to address alumni feedback and support and to see the students’ vision,” Dinesh said.

In 2022, MTC received full accreditation as an independent college, which invited new opportunities. Dinesh talked about student support services and the need to hire more staff. She also noted that the faculty does not receive pay and that MTC receives its funding fully from philanthropy.

“There isn’t just this rigorous academic race, but collaboration for other knowledgeable aspects like leadership,” Jamgochian said.

RE-ENTRY

Transitions Clinic Network staff visit SQNews

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Members of the SQNews sat down with Transitions Clinic Network staff to discuss incarceration, health, and reentry resources for people returning to society.

Bethany Divakaran is a program manager for TCN, overseeing the Reentry Health Care Hub. She noted the importance of having these meetings with those incarcerated so that people being released know about the resources available to them.

“The focus of this [Hub] project is on care coordination and helping individuals coming out of incarceration — particularly prisons — get reconnected to health care in their communities. We have been working with CDCR facilities across the state, including SQ, to support education for the nurses inside and also these care connections for individuals coming home,” said Divakaran.

Sharon Fennix, TCN’s hotline coordinator, discussed having the pleasure of helping people who need assistance or just someone to talk to. She said she had an aversion to doctors during her incarceration.

“I was not trusting of them and when they started talking, I would just turn off and stop listening because I was just waiting for them to tell me what to do,” said Fennix



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

TCN visited the newsroom to discuss reentry, incarceration, health, and resources available to returning citizens.

adding, “While incarcerated, doctors don’t give you a choice, but outside you have doctors who show compassion and empathy.”

Fennix served 38 years in prison. Upon her release, she didn’t know how to navigate her transition back onto the community. She said she returns to prisons to share her lived experiences with others.

“It’s important to talk to my brothers and sisters inside; it helps them to feel connected with someone outside. That is the support you want to have, the follow ups that the community healthcare should provide,” said Fennix, adding that, “reaching people inside allows us to support them better so that they could have a true connection upon reentry.”

Iris Tuakoi is a referrals coordinator for TCN. She talked about working with ISUDT, a program that started at SQ in 2019. She supports the general population by working closely with CDCR to improve care.

“[We] help patients get connected to care back home in the community and specifically to our TCN clinics, also

[we connect them] to community health workers to get them that support,” said Tuakoi.

TCN is a community based program based in the Bay Area. TCN has worked with 21 health systems across California to provide training and to support hiring community health workers with a lived experience of incarceration. Their California

reentry health care hotline is accessible 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Any person incarcerated or in the outside community can call the hotline Monday through Friday.

“We work with clinics in the community to help those medical providers and medical staff to become better [at] serving folks who have been incarcerated or are coming home from prison ... we want to meet the complex medical needs of folks who have been incarcerated as well as a lot of those social needs as well,” Divakaran said.

TCN has provided health care support for over 15,000 people who have been released from CDCR. The TCN Hub helps connect people to health care clinics and community health workers in the community, working closely with ISUDT prior to release. TCN clinics offer assistance with system-level difficulties that formerly incarcerated people may face once released. These clinics provide health care and social support, as well as referrals social services, reentry hubs, employment placement organizations, programs with transportation accessibility, transitional housing assistance programs, and case management services.

“The community health care workers have lived experiences, so they know about the different resources (available) in the community that they live in,” said Divakaran.

'Helping others is giving, and giving is receiving' Free-To-Succeed 'meet-and-greet' recognizes academic students

By Willy Alarcón
Staff Writer

In December, the Free-To-Succeed program gathered every student and its staff, in San Quentin’s Chapel A, for a “meet-and-greet”, to celebrate the accomplishments and the massive effort of every contributor during the past year.

FTS is a non-profit organization that provides educational opportunities to San Quentin’s community. Five days a weeks, from 6 to 8 p.m. the program opens its doors to prepare students.

The students learn English, reading and writing. The common theme for the program is “helping others is giving and giving is receiving?”

“This [program] is a step to be able to get where I’m going, closer to my GED,” said Abel Peña-Catalan, a new student. “I come from another prison...there was no one to teach. Now, it’s almost unimaginable. It’s a night and day change; I’m dedicated to learn.”

FTS is a walk-in program. FTS’s directors, Karen Smith and Daniel Costello, say they are proud of this fact.

The recognition ceremony began with beautiful music by the incarcerated band “Amigos de Rancho” as many of the 63 students arrived for the evening’s proceedings.

Throughout the night of students courageously took the stage to read letters of gratitude for their teachers, in English. The monumental achievement was cheerfully applauded.

Most of the students were uneducated, but they are now writing. They bravely spoke publicly in the language they are trying to master.

“There’s a magic that happens when the ‘code clicks’ in the brain of the students learning to read and write,” said George Dykstra — who originally founded the program back in 1996.

The magic is evidenced by the program’s many volunteers, that see real progress and the achievement



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQN

Members of Free-To-Succeed gather for a photo during 2023 Day of Peace event.

of men.

“I love teaching! I love to sit beside people who want to learn; it’s so rewarding.” Said Susan, a volunteer who recently joined the program. “Sometimes the students ask me, who is it easier to work with: the kids in the classroom or with them. ‘I said, ‘them’, because they really want to learn.”

Susan the program in September, after getting in touch with the program’s director. “I was always interested to get to know the prison population,” said Susan

Volunteer Delphino joined the program last summer as a teacher. He runs the ESL [English as a Second Language] class with resident Mauricio Arroyo. The students begin with no English skills, but quickly progress to almost intermediate level.

“They come every Monday with so much energy,” he said. “They make me bring my A-game. I tell everyone, ‘the students motivate me.”

The highlight was resident Tyrone earning his GED after a very challenging time during the pandemic. His grandmother had made him promise that he’d earn

that desired certificate, but then she passed away. The road was long and difficult, but the end result was a complete triumph and a promise kept, he said.

“I’ve learned to be comfortable with the uncomfortable,” read volunteer Ms. Smith, as part of Tyrone’s letter upon graduation. “Surround yourself with people who are different to grow in the uncomfortable process.”

To close, Mauricio Arroyo came to the stage to offer a few words of gratitude to the administration. “We have created a giant monster now,” he said, speaking of all the students who are willing to come and learn English.

The evening ended with a duet by violins playing “Holy Night” and hymnbooks with Christmas music were offered for the participants to join in and sing.

Free-to-Succeed is completely open for all. The program’s resident tutors: Carlos Drouaillet, Rene Fonseca, Raymond Melberg, and Arroyo all dedicate hours, expertise and a listening ear to the men who attend FTS.

—Arsenio Leyva
Contributing Writer

Reentry Intensive Case program found successful

LA county succeeds in reducing recidivism rates by 17% using reentry program

By Chuck VanVliet
Journalism Guild Writer

A study shows reentry programs contribute to the reduction of recidivism, concerning the people re-entering society after prison.

A new study reveals that Los Angeles County’s Reentry Intensive Case program has reduced the number of inmates returning to incarceration by 17%, according to the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

The study conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, found the program reduced recidivism by 6% as compared to non-participants, which is higher than 53 comparative programs.

“The resources, dignity and community that reentry services provide are paramount to reducing recidivism rates, setting people up for success, and making our communities safer,” said Susan Burton, founder of A New Way Of Life.

People who graduate from RCIMS had fewer convictions, arrest, incarcerations and parole revocations, asserted the article.

The study used data from April 2018 to March 2021. It conducted surveys of staff managers in 2022 and interviews with program managers, staff and participants between June 2019 and August 2022.

It found, that compared to non-participants, participants reached out to mental health more often, had fewer emergency room visits as well as reduced interaction with the criminal justice system.

Successful wraparound services like RICMS depend on a full range of community resources. LA County partners with 29 community based organizations whose goal it is to make these resources available in helping rebuild full

successful lives, the article noted.

The participants are match up with healthcare workers who act as liaisons between county, state and federal services to ensure a comprehensive outcomes, reported the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

Trust is gained in part through the community’s use of formerly incarcerated workers who have found their way out of the cycle of arrest and re-arrest, the report said. Adding that the program aims to help participants navigate the system of county services with their first hand lived experiences.

The group matches workers with female inmates released from the county’s regional detention center in Lynwood. They too use formerly incarcerated people and community based workers, a key to its success, noted the article.

“It’s our strong partnerships with community based organizations that makes the program possible,” said Vanessa Martin, director of reentry, LA County.

The purpose of Burton’s group is to take a recently released person and help them through the gauntlet of the reentry process.

The report cites some of the hurdles and logistics reentries face in transitioning back into the community. Among them Rent, unexpected down payment requirements, job search, paper work and being disadvantaged, according to the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

Then there are those who fall between the cracks and find themselves in areas with fewer resources and options available to them increasing their struggle for success.

“We don’t just provide shelter, it’s a holistic approach to the full person,” said Burton, whose organization celebrates its 25th anniversary.

YOUTH

Juvenile hall still not shut down despite vote

By Andrew Hardy
Staff Writer

San Francisco has abandoned its commitment to shutter its juvenile hall, where young people remain incarcerated four years after county supervisors voted to shut it down, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

In 2019, Supervisor Hilary Ronen led the charge to end incarceration of underage defendants.

“We’re done with jailing kids,” she said at the time. “We have a date; it’s going to be shut down. There’s no wiggle room.”

Receiving national recognition for the move, San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors created a task force to oversee the closure by the end of 2021.

Now, the project has failed and the effort, the *Chronicle* reported, is “dead.”

Margaret Brodtkin, president of the Juvenile Probation Commission said.

“I do think it is fair to say there is no realistic chance that we’re going to close our juvenile hall,” she said. “There is no live and viable plan at this point to achieve this goal.”

According to the *Chronicle*, the nearly empty facility has 150 beds and 88 full-time employees for its roughly 20 incarcerated youth. Its annual budget of \$18 million — excluding administrative and “embedded” expenses — saw operating costs approach \$2 million per incarcerated youth in 2020.

The public’s return-on-investment on the “jail-like” facility amounts to a “thin mattress in a cement-wall cell,” the article reported.

The facility that employs 88 full-time workers operates on a budget of \$18 million, not including administrative among other costs... the juvenile hall currently only houses 23 incarcerated juveniles as of 15 September 2023.

—San Francisco Chronicle

Unintended Consequences

Four years ago, Calif. Assemblyman Matt Haney was one of the supervisors who voted to close the juvenile hall.

“This jail for kids is morally repugnant,” he said in 2019. “It’s outdated [and] ineffective.”

Research cited by supervisors in 2019 showed that incarceration was harmful to young people and increased recidivism. But local politics, Covid delays, and emerging state-level policies all conspired to destroy any hope of accomplishing the closure.

First, local juvenile court judges refused to take part in the search for appropriate alternatives.

“They haven’t come to the table at all to be part of the conversation,” said Supervisor Shamann Walton. “That was a very real barrier.”

Then came Gov. Gavin Newsom’s announcement in 2020 that the state’s Department of Youth Corrections would be closing, with responsibility for youthful offenders’ care and custody returning to local authorities.

For the city and county of San Francisco, that meant

imprisoning adults under 25 — seven of them at present — in juvenile hall. There is no alternative housing for those sentenced as juveniles that meets the state’s “secure facility” requirements.

Brodtkin said ultimate responsibility lies with the Supervisors themselves.

“You think you can pass legislation and it’s going to happen magically. It’s not, and it can’t,” she said. “You have to do a lot more than pass legislation.”

Next Steps

In September 2023, local officials abandoned efforts to close juvenile hall. However, not everyone has given up.

Supervisor Walton, for one, is staying the course.

“We’re trying to work around obstacles that exist,” he said. “This is a process that takes longer than originally thought.”

Katy Miller, chief of Juvenile Probation, allocated \$500,000 for a consultant to study available options for either retrofitting the existing facility or demolishing it and rebuilding to meet the county’s modern needs.

“[T]his is not the space we want kids to be in,” she said. “This building was built at a time when secure settings for kids were constructed to look like jails. The architects say they would never design a place for kids like that now.”

For now, some juvenile offenders who don’t require incarceration are being placed with foster families or in group homes. Officials are also investing nearly \$2 million in fresh ideas and programs for the juvenile hall: support groups, remote learning, even yoga.

Children jailed for not stopping school fight

By Vance Eugene Sams Jr.
Journalism Guild Writer

A media-outlet partnership investigates the illegal detention of juvenile offenders, in the state of Tennessee’s juvenile justice system.

WPLN and ProPublica published a story on how under the supervision of Judge Donna Scott Davenport and Rutherford County in Tennessee illegally arrested and jailed black children.

“For the kids of Rutherford County getting sent to juvenile detention was almost a rite of passage, a normal part of childhood,” said Meribah Knight, a senior reporter at WLPN and producer at Nashville Public Radio.

Tennessee’s juvenile offenders have no rights to a jury trial, there is no check and balances to a judge’s authority. The state has juvenile judges with discretion, whether or not a kids should be detained, and for how long.

Judge Davenport has jailed kids as young as 7 years of age. Lawmakers are working to make sentences harsher for children. These new laws would make it easier to transfer children to adult court, noted the story.

In 2016, 11 black elementary school children allegedly witnessed a fight, between two children, ages five and six. All 13 of the children were arrested because they did not stop the fight.

Rutherford County justice system has stood out for years in terms of juvenile detainees. Since 2014 the County of Rutherford has 48% of its youthful offenders referred to court, while the state of Tennessee has only 5% mandated to appear in court, asserted the media’s investigation.



Illustration by Andrew Hardy // SQNews

Tennessee illegally holds eleven Black elementary school kids.

After calling for a judicial review by states Governor and 11 members of Congress, asked U.S. Dept. of Justice in a signed letter to investigate the county’s juvenile justice system.

With an investigation launched by the U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland. President Joe Biden appointee this newly, renewed criticism settled a class-action lawsuit of \$5 million for hundreds who have been arrested and jailed as children, according to the media outlets.

“There has to be something done to everyone who was involved in this,” said House Rep. Gloria Johnson D-Knoxville, Tennessee.

Johnson goes on to say the alleged crime was criminal responsibility for conduct of another fake law and a horrible abuse of power.

A Human Rights for Kids organization investigated in 2020 that Tennessee was ranked as the worst in the Nation concerning their inability to protect children’s rights.

Federal Judge calls these conditions inhumane placing kids in solitary confinement. As well as state lawmakers saying this is a “nightmare and “unchecked barbarism,” reported the article.

According to Nashville Public Radio, they found an inadequate system of oversight going all the way up to the state starting with the county and ending with Tennessee’s Department of Children’s services.

Judge Davenport in 2001, both declined to be interviewed, appointed Lynn Duke to Director of the Detention Center. However, all the detention centers will now have oversight by a new board regarding policies, procedures, and budget.

Juvenile Court Judge Sheila Calloway launched a new juvenile restorative justice program, allowing youthful offenders to meet with survivor of crimes.

This program allows young offenders accused of burglary, felony theft, or even homicide to have meaningful conversations between survivor and offenders working toward reconciliation and making meaningful amends, said article.

In January Davenport announced she would retire at the end of her term this summer and would not be seeking re-election, Judge Davenport remained on the bench for years before retiring in 2022, according to WPLN and ProPublica.

Racial justice policies can make communities safer

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

Policies aimed at reducing racial inequality within the criminal justice system make communities safer and contribute to the overall reduction in correctional populations, according to *Vanguard*.

A report entitled, “Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy,” from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and

Medicine, examined how racial inequality is perpetuated within the criminal justice system.

The committee analyzed data on crime, racial disparities in criminal justice interactions, and evidence-based policies. Recommendations were provided to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

The report concluded that there is no need for policymakers to decide between public safety and racial equity.

“...[B]ans on unconstitutional incarceration and policing, evaluating sentencing reform for drug offenses, and focusing on bail reform actually result in less needed supervision in community,” the committee noted.

The criminal legal process still exhibits racial and ethnic disparities in arrests, pre-trial detention, sentencing, and incarceration, according to the committee. Recent trends indicate a decline in racial disparities in carceral settings

during a period of reduction in the overall correctional population from 2008 to 2020.

However, the report noted that, regardless of the overall progress, certain jurisdictions still have large racial disparities. The committee’s first point was that those in power ought to coordinate reforms across local, state and federal levels of the criminal justice system. Policymakers should increase accountability, public participation, and evaluation of community

impact on those most directly affected by the policies, the report said.

To improve the criminal justice system, policymakers need to acknowledge “that every community is different — a band-aid approach of simply copying the approach of another will not work in the same way,” the article’s author, Audrey Sawyer, wrote.

The report recommended reducing police stops and searches, limiting prison

admissions and only using jail detentions for those who pose an immediate or serious risk to society, the report said.

They also suggested reducing “police response to non-violent behavior and mental health incidents,” eliminating cash bail, and “invest[ing] in alternative interventions to reduce violence (such as community relations improvement and coordination with non-criminal justice agencies),” Sawyer wrote.



By Pheng Ly
Staff Writer

In early October family members of David Innocencio and residents gathered in the ARC building of San Quentin Rehabilitation Center to honor his legacy and contribution to The Beat Within.

David Innocencio's torch burns on
LEGACY OF THE BEAT WITHIN WITNESSED BY CREATOR'S FAMILY

San Quentin’s administration granted the family members entry so they could see the space in which Innocencio had helped to give voice to countless incarcerated persons.

As part of his youth advocacy work, Innocencio spent nearly three decades of his life trying to provide a safe space for at-risk and troubled youths, not just in California juvenile detention centers, but also nationwide. He wanted them to have the ability freely to express their emotions.

Once news of his passing had reached San Quentin, the

information had instantaneous impact. Kenny Vernon, Kid CAT chair and TBW participant, said he recalled seeing residents of all ages break down and weep and others sitting in silent disbelief and staring off into the distance to process the words they had just heard.

According to TBW participants, during their first meeting after hearing of Innocencio’s passing, everyone needed healing, not only the residents but also the community that stretches across the nation.

Courtney Rein and Ali Moss, two volunteers for the program, had suggested holding a memorial for Innocencio at

San Quentin. The two of them had worked with him for years. Innocencio’s family wanted to come to San Quentin, stand inside the prison building, and touch the space in which he conducted his writing workshop.

Kid CAT group staff sponsor Mikko Valdez wasted no time in turning the family’s wish into reality. She made phone calls, she sent e-mails, and she spent countless minutes and hours to make connections. Her efforts soon helped to touch hearts.

The memorial had great importance to The Beat Within family at San Quentin and beyond. It provided the chance to help his family and

the community through trying times, in much the same way he had supported everyone whose lives he touched.

“It was an absolute blessing to be a part of this memorial for David with the people of San Quentin, Courtney, Ali, and David’s family,” said Brady Godoy, TBW participant and contributing writer.

On the day of the memorial, the room overflowed with residents who had known Innocencio for years as well as many residents who had come to pay their respects and offer condolences.

Participants said that once Innocencio’s family entered the room, the atmosphere felt heavy-hearted. Attendees told

stories about the empathy and love they all had in common with Innocencio.

As his family relayed memories of him growing up and painted a picture of young Innocencio developing into the person who would affect so many lives, everyone in the room grieved — but also healed as a group with tears and laughter, highs and lows, and support and soothing.

Survived by his wife and children, Innocencio left behind the legacy of having helped to make human connections for those who felt disconnected from humanity. This legacy continues to live on here at San Quentin as a permanent fixture.

HEALTH

California, state officials found liable for deliberate indifference during 2020 Covid outbreak

By Anthony Manuel
Carvalho
Staff Writer

The Ninth Circuit ruled California prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference,” by not taking sufficient precautions or countermeasures during the 2020 Covid outbreak, reported the *Courthouse News Service*. The decision allows the State and San Quentin State Prison officials to face liability for the Covid outbreak where 29 persons died and infected over 2,000 San Quentin community members.

Former resident, Michael Hampton died during the outbreak. His widow filed a lawsuit claiming prison officials exposed him to Covid, violating her husband’s constitutional rights.

The three judge’s ruling

allows widowed Hampton’s Eighth Amendment claim to proceed. Mrs. Hampton, “adequately alleged that defendants acted with deliberate indifference to the health and safety of San Quentin inmates, including Hampton,” said the panel, according to the article.

The case was spurned by CDCR’s transfer of 122 medical-high-risk residents from California’s Institution for Men in Chino. The “Chino transfers” became the catalyst for San Quentin’s Covid outbreak.

Most of the Chino transfers received no testing or screening for Covid before boarding buses headed for San Quentin, said the article.

The state’s prison officials requested relief for qualified immunity from liability by arguing for implementation

of the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP). The act passed in 2005, providing qualified immunity to vaccine manufacturers during public health crises.

In May, Senior U.S. District Judge William Orrick III denied the state’s request for immunity. The Ninth Circuit panel affirmed Orrick’s decision On October 3, 2023.

Judges Michelle Friedland, a Barack Obama appointee, Mark Bennett, a Donald Trump appointee, and Richard Bennett, a George W. Bush appointee opined, “We affirm the district court’s conclusion...officials are not entitled to immunity under federal law for the claimed violation...and we lack jurisdiction to consider whether the officials are entitled to immunity under

state law.”

The panel said the PREP Act doesn’t shield prison officials because they “failed to administer a ‘covered countermeasure,’ such as vaccines, medication, devices, or other measures used to prevent, diagnose, or treat a public health emergency or a security threat.”

The panel determined the issue concerns the right to freedom from exposure to a serious disease. The panel cited *Helling v. McKinney*, a 1993 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In re: *Helling*, the Supreme Court ruled incarcerated possess rights to sue to prove Eighth Amendment violations if prison officials acted with deliberate indifference.

Judge Friedland stated, “All had been briefed on the

dangers of Covid, [it’s] highly transmissible nature..., the necessity of ...taking precautions to prevent its spread. Defendants were also aware that containing an outbreak at San Quentin would be particularly difficult due to its tight quarters, antiquated design, and poor ventilation.”

“All reasonable prison officials...on notice in 2020...that they could be held liable for exposing inmates to a serious disease, including a serious communicable disease,” Friedland wrote.

The article stated San Quentin officials maintained they had no adequate options to protect the incarcerated community from exposure. They responded that any decision they made could endanger inmates.

“Defendants’ argument fails

because it rests on a premise contrary to the complaint’s allegations. Plaintiff does not challenge defendants’ decision to transfer inmates out of CIM.

“Rather, plaintiff challenges decisions that defendants made in carrying out the transfer that increased the risk to San Quentin inmates without decreasing the risk to the transferred inmates,” Friedland wrote.

Patrick Baylis, one of Michael Hampton’s best friends, said, “All of us have leave scars for the rest of our lives. Who knows the years we lost to Post Acute Covid Syndrome, but it’s right that Mrs. Hampton and all survivors’ families are compensated.”

The case returns to Orrick’s court as survivors of 29 men who died await the outcome.

California first in gender-affirming surgery

By Cassandra N. Evans
Journalism Guild Writer

A San Quentin incarcerated trans-woman received gender-affirming surgery after California permitted gender affirmation surgery to incarcerated persons, a first in the nation.

According to CALmatters, two groundbreaking policies had turned to law in the past seven years. First, in 2017, California set standards for granting gender-affirming surgery for incarcerated persons. Second, in 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law that requires CDCR to ask each incoming incarcerated person gender-specific questions to identify their preferred housing.

Since the new policies and procedures took effect, the number of transgender, intersex and non-binary

incarcerated persons has increased annually, rising by 234% to 1,617 since 2017, said the article.

“The vulnerable, transgender and transgender-diverse population in CDCR has grown and continues to grow and there are enduring needs that need to be met,” Trisha Wallis, a department senior psychologist who specializes in gender healthcare, said during a budget committee hearing in March 2023.

For Jamie Acosta, a transgender woman housed at San Quentin, the process to receive approval for gender-affirming surgery took about a year.

Two months after approval, Acosta started electrolysis appointments. The depilatory procedure that lasted for about six to seven months, Acosta said.

“My surgery was done on

March 29, 2023; it took 7 1/2 hours. The surgery started at 7 am, and was done at 2:30 pm,” said Acosta.

Acosta spent three days in a Marin Hospital in recovery, and then transferred to a San Francisco hospital. CDCR later moved her to a prison hospital in Stockton and then transferred her back to San Quentin.

“When I was returned to San Quentin I was on limited duty before I could return to work,” said Acosta.

Acosta said she did not have any problems with her recovery. She said obtaining the proper medical supplies needed for recovery took some time at first, but medical providers soon stocked all necessary items.

From 2021 to 2022, 270 incarcerated Californians have asked for gender-affirming surgeries.



Javier Jimenez // SQNews

Jamie Acosta running the soundboard during an SQ event.

Projections show that 462 incarcerated persons may request gender-affirming treatment in 2024, according to CALmatters.

Transgender advocates say states do not allow transfers

for incarcerated persons who have not yet received gender-affirming medical care.

Jen Orthwein, a psychologist and lawyer who previously provided treatment to transgender inmates in

prisons across California, said, “Ultimately the housing question should not be a medical question.”

The Women’s Liberation Front, a feminist advocacy group based in Washington D.C., sued the state for putting a hold on transfers to Chowchilla State Prison, a women’s facility, saying that such transfers might bring about sexual assault.

Several states have followed California gender-affirming policies. Massachusetts and Connecticut also allows transfers for inmates according to their gender identity, noted the news.

Acosta remains at San Quentin and studies in the computer-coding program beside male students.

“Today I feel great, I am happy that I got the surgery. I am looking forward to my future as a woman. My daughter is very happy for her mom. She’s is also very supportive,” said Acosta.

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

Myth or Fact #1:
Mental illness is common.
FACT - Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. More than 1 in 5 US adults are living with a mental illness. Some examples of common conditions are anxiety, depression, Bipolar disorder, Schizophrenia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and more. Mental health challenges may affect anyone at any time.

Myth or Fact #2:
There is nothing that I can do for a person experiencing a mental health challenge.
MYTH - Friends and loved ones can help by: Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, reaching out and helping them access mental health resources, being non-judgmental and treating them with respect, and refusing to define them by their diagnosis.

Myth or Fact #3:
People who experience mental health challenges are more likely to be unpredictable

Reducing mental health stigma

Debunking myths about mental health — Myth or Fact?



and violent. **MYTH** - People living with mental illnesses are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. Many people who face mental challenges are highly active and productive members of their community.

What is mental health stigma?

Mental health stigma is the negative attitude towards people who are living with a mental illness. Stigma happens when there is a lack of understanding about mental health conditions and what it is like to live with such conditions. Some common examples of mental health stigma: assuming someone living with a mental health condition is violent, avoiding people with mental health conditions, assuming someone is weak for getting care, using harmful language or labels like describing someone as “crazy”, and companies refusing to hire someone because of their mental health condition.

Why is reducing stigma around mental health important?

Stigma is harmful to everyone, so recognizing and reducing mental health stigma is important. Stigma can lead to harmful assumptions and discrimination directed at people living with mental illnesses. Stigma can cause people with mental health conditions to think negatively about themselves, affecting their relationships and how they interact with others. Stigma can cause fear and isolate those experiencing mental health challenges, causing them to not seek help or access care. In fact, more than 60% of people who face mental health challenges and illnesses will not reach out for help and care.

Negative attitudes towards those experiencing mental illness are even more harmful in jails and prisons. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, about 63% of people in state and federal prisons do not receive medical treatment while incarcerated. Mental health stigma makes navigating life in jail or prison more challenging for people incarcerated living with mental health conditions. Incarceration is already isolating and facing stigma can lead to more self-isolation. People may not seek treatment for their conditions for fear of being discriminated against, which can continue out in the community after release. Stigma also harms the whole

community, prolonging negative assumptions and making it less safe and welcoming for everyone.

What are ways to reduce stigma around mental health?

Here are some steps you can take to reduce mental health stigma:

- Remember that mental illness is common and all of us need to pay attention to our mental health.
- Educate yourself: Knowledge and empathy help combat negative assumptions. Learn more about common mental health conditions and try to understand what it is like to live with a mental illness. Listen to the experiences of your peers living with mental illness and who may have been impacted by stigma. Listen to others without judgement.
- Talk more openly about mental health: Sharing what we know and what we have experienced within our community helps everyone grow in knowledge and empathy. Remember, mental health is just as important as your physical health. Stress and anxiety should be discussed as openly as physical health conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes. Being open and non-judgmental can encourage others to share about their experiences.
- Change how you talk about mental illness: Avoid using language and labels that can

be harmful, such as calling someone ‘crazy’ or ‘psycho.’ These hurtful labels can cause those experiencing mental illness to feel negatively about themselves and can lead them to not seek help. If you hear someone else using stigmatizing language you can share why that might be harmful.

What mental health services are available inside prison?

Taking care of your mental health is so important. It is important to not let stigma get in the way of seeking help. Untreated mental illness can impact your physical health, your relationships, and other aspects of your daily life. CDCR has a Statewide Mental Health Program (SMHP), which ensures that patients inside have ready access to mental health services. The SMHP can assist you in receiving mental health care based on your needs to live a healthier life inside and upon reentry into the community. All people are asked about mental health when coming into prison and you can always request to speak with someone about your mental health.

What mental health services are available in the community?

Whether you are participating in mental health treatments while in prison or not, know that you can always access mental health care in

the community. Medi-Cal insurance pays for mental health care. Health care clinics in the community often offer medical care and mental health services under one roof. Many people coming out of prison experience stress, so seeking mental health support may be more important than ever! Transitions Clinic Network can help you connect with a clinic in your community!

Whether in prison or out in the community, all of us can continue to recognize and reduce mental health stigma around us. We can change our own thoughts, actions, and language and help others do the same to create spaces that are safer for everyone. If you are living with a mental health challenge, know that you are important and not alone! Mental health challenges can affect anyone at any time, which makes taking care of your mental health and reducing stiall the more important.

If you have healthcare-related questions about reentry, feel free to write us at: Transitions Clinic Network, 2403 Keith Street, San Francisco, CA 94124. Or call our Reentry Health Hotline today at (510) 606-6400 to speak with a CHW and to see if there’s a TCN program in your community of return. We accept collect calls from CDCR. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

ESPAÑOL

Por Willy Alarcón
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

Las graduaciones dentro de San Quentin siguen sin interrupción.

Este jueves pasado, del año vigente, 91 personas se graduaron del programa de Tratamiento Integrado de la Enfermedad por Uso de Sustancia (ISDUT, en inglés).

Esta graduación fue la culminación del programa después de la larga pausa por la pandemia del COVID. Los graduados se conglomeraron para tener su celebración en la capilla B, con toda la regalía debida para este logro tan feliz.

Este programa, que ya existe en muchas prisiones de California, ayuda a los hombres a poder examinar sus hábitos, curar sus adicciones y caminar hacia sus nuevos futuros, con los recursos que necesiten.

El Dr. Lance Bohn, director del programa ISUDT, felicitó a los estudiantes que pasaron mucho tiempo introspectivamente examinándose desde el interior.

“No hay nada mejor que venir a SQ para trabajar con ustedes”, dijo él y nos recordó de las palabras del Gob. Newsom, “vendrán a SQ para irse a sus casas”.

Con música proveída por el grupo Greater Good y la presentación de las banderas, por los veteranos de San Quentin — se le dio inicio a esta anticipada ceremonia.

La maestra de ceremonia, Stephany Sanchez, dio la bienvenida y explicó la necesidad que causó el nacimiento de este programa. “Nuestra meta, es reducir el reincido y promover la recuperación”, dijo ella.

Luego se le pidió a todos los que estaban presentes que se pusieran de pie para la lectura del credo “Center Point” y con eso, se introdujo al personal de la prisión que apoya este proyecto.

El teniente Gardea habló felicitando a los estudiantes del curso y añadió, ¡“otra vez, felicitaciones y agarremos pizza”!, causando mucha risa.

Muchos de la administración, juntamente se hicieron presentes para atestiguar la transformación de estos hombres. Presente



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Los integrantes del grupo ISDUT con gran gozo se preparan para su graduación.

Participantes del programa ISUDT se gradúan para sus nuevos futuros

también estuvieron: la capitana del programa, Oliveriz, el asociado del DRP, el señor E. Patio, y varios consejeros del programa y la administración de la prisión.

Y así se comenzó la procesión de los hombres que orgullosamente recibirían sus certificados.

Cada uno pasó al escenario para ser reconocido y permitir que sus seres amados gritaran de júbilo al ver este logro tan merecido. Los latinos y las personas con problemas auditivos fueron destacados durante la procesión, también.

Entre los facilitadores del programa, las consejeras Stephany Sanches y Elia Cortés, llevan a cabo los programas en español, para aquellos que tienen dificultad con el inglés. Este programa también cuenta con la ayuda de un intérprete.

Olegario Ambríz, trabaja como voluntario para la comunidad hispana. De acuerdo al Sr. Ambríz, vio la necesidad de ayudar cuando personas que no hablaban inglés tenían dificultad con el material y la comunicación.

Él dice que esto es parte de sus enmiendas por su pasado y que quiere dar a su comunidad aquí.

“Estoy haciendo una propuesta al coordinador para poder tener un grupo o dos en español, con patrocinador interno”, dijo Olegario. Las consejeras Cortés y Sánchez



Zacharyiso Martinez, orgullosamente muestra su certificado de ISUDT

estarían para apoyar esta nueva avenida.

Según él, quiere hacer la propuesta al coordinador para involucrar más a la comunidad hispana. Así el latino tendrá más muchas de las mismas oportunidades facilitadas a los de habla inglés.

Aunque el Dr. Bohn aclaró que la meta es de tener un solo programa, para poder incorporar la perspectiva multicultural y poder aprender de otras personas.

La capitana del programa ISUDT, Oliveriz, dice que ella desea ver más oportunidad, en cuanto a la educación.

“El edificio, que será construido, tendrá todo tipo de

cursos; todas las cosas que oímos del modelo californiano...las relaciones [también] para poder venir y tener y querer las mismas cosas en común tratándonos bien”.

Con estos avances, los de habla español deben aprovechar estas puertas abiertas para inscribirse, participar, transformarse, y mostrarle al mundo entero que el cambio si es posible.

La capitana Oliveriz, dice que ella aprendió en la academia que si tú puedes cambiar la vida de una persona, haz hecho tu trabajo y añadió, “Cuando tú lo ves, entonces se puede creer”.

Aristeo Sampablo
Escritor Contribuyente

Llamadas de largas distancia interrumpidas

Por Arsenio Leyva
Journalism Guild Writer

Una cantidad alarmante de reos no pueden comunicarse con sus familiares.

San Quentin lleva ya varias semanas con el problema de establecer la conexión con los seres amados fuera del país. Apparently, la causa está ubicada en una aplicación telefónica que filtra todas las llamadas automatizadas.

Este problema — potencialmente — está afectando a todo encarcelado estatal y tal vez en el país entero, que usa la comunicación internacional.

“No he podido comunicarme con mis seres queridos”, lamentó el residente Javier Majillon, 57. Él siente mucha frustración y pesar por el largo plazo de tiempo que lleva sin poder realizar sus llamadas. “A veces me siento triste, porque tengo a mi padre enfermo en Michoacán, México”.

Más de 400 personas tienen su servicio de llamadas internacionales bloqueadas. Apenas unos pocos de estos, por fin lograron establecer comunicación, después de marcar muchísimas veces.

“Me he pasado hasta media hora marcando, hasta que entra una llamada a México”, dijo Daniel Arciniega, 55.

Sin embargo, la mayoría de la población sigue frustrada al no poder contar con el servicio adecuado.

Esta inconveniencia se estima que está afectando a residentes en los dos diferentes lugares de residencia: en la sección A, son aproximadamente unas 300 personas y en la sección B, son unas 150.

Las compañías telefónicas estadounidenses, T-Mobile y Boost Mobile, confían que la comunicación está siendo bloqueada por un cambio reciente de pólizas, que no permite que las llamadas de las prisiones se establezcan con las familias.

Toda llamada manejada por medio de GTL (Global Tel-Link en inglés), usa un servicio automático o

computarizado para establecer la comunicación con el destinatario.

La aplicación telefónica, conocida como “Scamshield” para filtrar las “robo-llamadas”, detecta estas llamadas automatizadas como “fraudulentas” y las bloquea. Quiere decir que toda llamada automatizada iniciada por GTL, es casi garantizada que nunca se conectará.

Los residentes encarcelados están realizando las llamadas, pero los familiares afuera, no reciben notificación que hay una llamada en proceso.

Pero hay posibles métodos de solución

De acuerdo al periódico, OREGON CURE, hay dos alternativas viables para poder permitir que las llamadas iniciadas desde de las prisiones se conecten:

La primera alternativa es hablar con el departamento de servicio del consumidor de T-Mobile o Boost Mobile, solicitando que el número de la prisión que aparece, sea removido de la lista de bloqueo.

La segunda alternativa es bajar la aplicación “Scamshield” a sus teléfonos de T-Mobile o Boost Mobile y agregar el número que desea admitir.

Hay una tercera opción si estas anteriores fallan.

“Textnow”, es una aplicación que asigna un número telefónico virtual al descargador — completamente gratis. Con este nuevo número, la persona puede elegir un número “local”, para quitar la etiqueta de las llamadas internacionales.

Cuando la persona ingresa, selecciona un número del área cerca y lo agrega a sus contactos personales, para que no sea visto como número “scam” o fraudulento, permitiendo la línea de comunicación adecuada.

Se espera que estas soluciones, permitan que continúe la comunicación entre los reos y familiares, algo esencial que contribuye a la rehabilitación y el vínculo familiar.

Completan curso para Vidales totalmente en español en San Quentin

23 hombres del primer grupo de ayuda para hacer presencia ante las Audiencias de Libertad Condicional (BPH, por sus iniciales en inglés), se graduaron este pasado octubre 14.

Este es el primer conjunto de apoyo, completamente dirigido, equipado y manejado dentro de los edificios de vivienda ganada, totalmente en español. Este grupo está abriendo puertas para la comunidad latina, demostrando la posibilidad del modelo californiano en San Quentin.

BPH es un nuevo modelo californiano, que se espera sea implementado pronto, ya está efectuando cambios dentro de las paredes de SQ.

Solo entre el 21 al 25% de los participantes que están en este grupo, tienen previa experiencia con las BPH, el resto de los Vidales nunca han pasado por el arduo proceso.

A cada participante se le requirió que se hiciera presente y compartiera activamente acerca de los factores que los provocan y les perjudican sus oportunidades ante las BPH.

El residente, recién graduado Guillermo Cardona comentó, “Me ayudó a entender la persona que yo era antes. Ahora me estoy

preparando para ir a la tabla [BPH], cambiado”.

Estos hombres cubrieron varios temas que frecuentemente son desconocidos para la mayoría de habla español, son:

- Repaso de los 12 pasos
- Que es un Audiencia de Libertad Condicional
- Cuáles son los factores causantes
- Línea de tiempo
- Factores contribuyentes
- Detonadores
- Cartas de remordimiento
- Perspectiva
- Planes de libertad condicional
- Planes de recaída de alcohol, drogas y violencia domestica
- Enmiendas – todo lo que se hace para rehabilitar

Todo el material necesitado fue buscado y conglomerado por su coordinador, Idalio Villagrán — residente de SQ, quien fue impulsado por otra persona a encargarse de este grupo. Asimismo, contó con la ayuda vital de Pedro Benítez para hacer que el grupo marchara.

“Me es importante, porque antes que yo asistiera, yo no tenía el conocimiento que hoy tengo”, dijo el graduado residente, Paulino Gonzales 57. “[Me] Preparo para ir a



Photos by Aristeo Sampablo // SQNews

Los graduados quedan capacitados para la Audiencia de Libertad Condicional

la tabla por primera vez. No sé cómo será, pero entiendo que son pesados en trato... intimidantes”.

Hoy, después de 12 semanas — cubriendo tanto material, estos hombres celebran su logro tan merecido. Con mucho gozo, el coordinador compartió que cada uno aprobó el curso y reconoció el esfuerzo puesto por todos ellos, para lograr sus metas.

La ceremonia de hoy inició con una breve oración, dándole todo el crédito a Dios, por hacer posible que este distintivo curso y posiblemente único en todo California, se

abriera.

Con un breve repaso de cada una de las metas logradas, se le accedió un certificado a cada miembro y se les permitió unas breves palabras de agradecimiento. En seguida, se les otorgó su “crono”, confirmando el reconocimiento por parte de la administración.

Con un certificado especial de gratitud, se le dio un reconocimiento particular a Michael “Paisa Mike” Beaudette, quien facilitó la introducción del grupo dentro del edificio de vivienda ganada, Donner.

Los de habla español,

“han tenido poca representación”, confirmó Michael. “Mi intención fue de asegurarme que [toda] la población tuviera su segmento de grupos de apoyo aquí”.

Para el, todo tiene que ver con la ayuda que se le debe otorgar a toda la población, en diferentes formas — religión, academia, perspicacia, etc.

Estos mismos edificios, que anteriormente eran usados para recepción y “Death Row” o cadena de muerte, hoy se destacan por los programas que se llevan a cabo por dentro, por el respeto, y el cambio.

Los oficiales allí se prestan para trabajar, con la población entera, en facilitando estos tipos de grupos de ayuda.

Con aplausos y mucha celebración, este grupo enseña lo que se puede lograr cuando se buscan las avenidas adecuadas y la administración pone el empeño para ayudar a los residentes, a mejorar sus oportunidades de reintegrar a la comunidad que les espera.

Ricardo “tuca” Morales dice que este grupo es muy necesario, “para que todos los que estamos aquí, tengamos la oportunidad para salir a la sociedad”.

“Me quiero inscribir para ver cómo me puedo preparar para la tabla [BPH]”, añadió él.

La vista ya está puesta al futuro cercano, para expandir este tipo de grupos a otros edificios de vivienda ganada — aun a “East Block” o “Death Row”, cuando sea renovado.

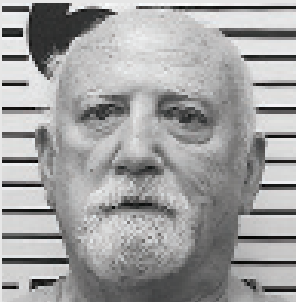
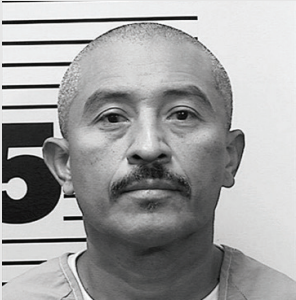
Todos están de acuerdo; este programa es de gran ayuda y causa para celebrar. La segunda etapa de este grupo ya está por comenzar y si esta primera cohorte, nos indica, será un éxito en espera.

—Willy Alarcón

Se realiza una vigilia para los recién fallecidos en San Quentin

**Por Arsenio Leyva
Journalism Guild Writer**

La administración estatal, los oficiales y los residentes de la prisión conmemoraron las vidas de los recientes fallecidos por el suicidio en una vigilia única dentro de San Quentin este octubre pasado. Durante la sesión, se apreció el interés en común de buscar la comprensión sobre el suicidio. El ambiente era de pesar, tanto como de ánimo. Con las palabras, “es una pena que la tragedia nos une de esta manera”, dichas por la Dra. Rachel Chen, encargada de salud mental, se dio inicio. “Esta vigilia les da, tanto a los trabajadores como los encarcelados, la oportunidad para sanar juntos y crecer juntos”. “Muchos de nosotros no tenemos el tiempo, ni el espacio para verdaderamente llorar por nuestros muertos”, añadió ella.



El maestro de ceremonia, Ned Buskirk, director del programa “Vivos Adentro” (Alive Inside, en inglés) compartió como tratando con la muerte puede ser muy difícil, especialmente cuando es a causa del suicidio.

Al terminar su pequeña introducción, se le dio la oportunidad a todos que desearan compartir su dolor o su experiencia, sobre como navegaron con el dolor por la pérdida de un ser querido.

Ayuda para sobrellevar la muerte

El Dr. Paul Burton, director de psiquiatría, compartió que no solo la muerte es una realidad, “el tratamiento mental es real también. Requiere verdadera fuerza para alcanzar solicitar ayuda. Sufrimos la pérdida de dos vidas, para celebrar los vivos que aun estan aquí”.

El capellán católico, Padre Williams, compartió unas palabras de consuelo que incluyó una cita del Apóstol Pablo en el primer libro de Corintios 15 – el misterio de la transformación del cuerpo, al momento de la muerte.

También se tocó una canción especial, “Tomado por las mareas” (Taken by the tides, en inglés). La melodía facilitó a todos tomar el sentido correcto y permitió a la audiencia participar.

Durante la música, el rabino se sentó junto con el sacerdote. Estos dos colegas compartieron del evento, porque la muerte impacta ambas fes. Fue una bonita escena acompañada de bonita música.

Residentes de SQ ofrecen esperanza y ayuda

La banda “Esperanza” tomó el escenario para entonar el bello himno, “Cuan Grande es Él”. Según el líder

del grupo, Gerry Muratalla, querían resaltar el gozo en vez de la tristeza con su canto.

El himno hablaba del gozo que la persona siente al acercarse a Dios, con la esperanza que el alma que partió lo verá, sin sufrir ya más.

Patrick Hayes, de “Guardianes de la Luz” (Light Keepers, en inglés) compartió, “[El] estar aquí me ayuda a sobrepasar el dolor”. Hayes aseguró que, “si ustedes nos hablan, todo lo que nos digan, será confidencial”.

El dice que el grupo de Guardianes de la Luz existe para poner paro a todo suicidio, violencia, y sobre-dosis en SQ.

Se recuerda a Hugo Cruz
Pablo Salinas, que también es de los Guardianes de la Luz, habló en memoria de Hugo Cruz; recordando los tiempos de calidad que pasaron juntos.

“Lo veía en la yarda, jugando futbol; ahora ya no lo veo más”, recordó él. “Esto es real...estoy más involucrado con mi comunidad, no solo la hispana, sino toda”.

Cornel Allen Jr. compartió un bello poema sobre el significado del nombre “Tierra”, detallando cada letra con una palabra con mucho significado para la vida.

Pablo Sánchez, pasó al frente para entonar un canto en alabanza. El canto “Inmolado y Desechado” habló del sufrimiento de Cristo por toda la humanidad, y nos recordó que todos hemos sufrido y padecido en el caminar de la vida.

Albert Campos, residente de SQ con problemas auditivos — habló por medio de su intérprete de su amigo con problemas auditivos, que se tomó la vida. “En la comunidad de personas con problemas auditivos, es muy común sentirse aislado y marginalizado”, él nos compartió.

Los veteranos subieron para recordar a uno de los suyos

El residente y veterano, Noah Winchester, habló de lo difícil que fue saber del pasar del veterano Michael Antrobus y de lo frustrado que se sintió con la administración, al ver el trato de un miembro de las fuerzas armadas, que no se le otorgo una última muestra de dignidad y respeto.

El tomó la oportunidad para informarnos de la cantidad de veteranos que se toman la vida diariamente – 22 veteranos cometen suicidio por día. El suicidio es especialmente difícil para los veteranos.

El veterano residente, Jim Snider, hizo un recordatorio de Jesse Hernández, que falleció hace ocho años. Dice él que habían señas que intentaría suicidarse— regaló todas sus pertenencias.

“Que su memoria viva en nosotros, mostrando aprecio y respeto los unos por los otros”, dijo Snider. “Hablen menos, escuchen más”.

Más comprensión sobre el suicidio

Este evento único concluyó con música instrumental, durante la cual se nos permitió decir, a voz alta, los nombres de personas amadas que hemos perdido.

Este tipo de reuniones hacían mucha falta y se agradece a la administración de salud mental, por hacer este programa disponible.

El siguiente evento de este tipo, está programado para el día 21 de noviembre, en la capilla A.



Photos by Aristeo Sampablo // SQNews

Con una oración, finalizan su dedicación los graduados de Gateway Seminary

**Por Willy Alarcón
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair**

Gateway Seminary (GTS, por sus siglas en inglés) condujo su muy-esperada ceremonia de graduación, el pasado septiembre 29, 2023 en la capilla de San Quentin. Seis hombres recibieron numerosos premios, reconociendo sus esfuerzos, de los cuales fueron tres hispanos.

GTS provee educación bíblica y prepara a hombres para el servicio en el ministerio.

El director de la escuela de teología del norte de la bahía, Miguel Rodríguez dice que el corazón del seminario, es el corazón de Jesús para el ministerio de aquellos dentro de la prisión, basándose en el evangelio de Mateo, capítulo 25.

Esta es la primera graduación conducida desde el 2018, por una larga pausa debido a la pandemia del COVID.

Con mucha emoción, el director Rodríguez anunció, ¡“Gracias a Dios, El removió los obstáculos! ¡Y gracias al teniente Gardea, por trabajar duro para ayudarnos que se llevara a cabo este evento”!

La ceremonia se inició con bonita música instrumental por el grupo Greater Good y una breve oración por el

instructor Sik-Lam Wong.

El residente de SQ, Sergio Álvarez, fue invitado para compartir su testimonio. “Quebrado”, fue su mensaje personal de la transformación, compartiendo como antes de conocer a Cristo en la cárcel, él era como vidrio quebrado — con “puntas filudas”.

Encerrado y con aburrimiento absurdo, no tenía nada que hacer pero reflexionar en su pasado — hasta que un guardia le dio una Biblia que leer.

Devorando el libro, declaró, “La leí desde el mero título. No me perdí ni una letra. ¡Trabajé hasta llegar al fin”! Y el comentó como Dios se le reveló, quitándole esas puntas agudas.

Sus hermanas que pudieron venir para celebrar este logro, afirmaron su cambio diciendo que, “Es tan positivo. No es el mismo hombre que era, años atrás”. Y añadieron, “Esto definitivamente es un llamado de Dios”.

Los instructores loan a los estudiantes de teología en SQ

Robert Lawler, maestro de GTS, dijo que él ve algo único en San Quentin. “...Veo lo fluido en como hablan sobre su fe con facilidad y la definición en su teología; hay un claro entendimiento de quien Dios es y quien ellos son en

Dios”, dijo él.

Y añadió, “...hay un intenso sentido de propósito aquí”.

El instructor Jackson dejó su carrera de enfermería hace 25 años, para enfocarse en su llamado de ministerio de prisión — sirviendo a los tailandeses encarcelados, por medio de Casa de Bendición desde el 2013.

Por los últimos diez años, él ha enseñado hermenéutica, liderazgo e historia de la iglesia en GTS.

El dice que parte de los esfuerzos rehabilitativos de cada persona encarcelada, es el desarrollo mental. Pero que debe haber otra porción espiritual igualmente necesaria, para estos individuos que buscan redimir sus vidas, de sus pasados — un desarrollo espiritual.

De acuerdo al Sr. Jackson, los estudiantes que se enfocan en ambos, son victoriosos y el los felicita diciéndoles, ¡“Mis respetos para los triunfantes”!

Transformación, cambio y propósito

El Dr. Warren Haines, Director de Gateway Seminary Advance, llamó por nombre a cada alumno y uno por uno; cada hombre recibió su debido reconocimiento.

Ellos estan orgullosos de sus logros, habiendo invertido largas horas de estudio, búsqueda y trabajo de sus

cursos — honradamente estan de pie en el escenario para recibir sus diplomas y certificados.

Cada uno compartió razones similares para tomar los cursos del seminario. Algunos buscaban cambio en sus vidas, otros se enfocaron en consejería para ayudar a los demás, y otros más, simplemente querían entender por qué creen lo que creen.

Al fin, todos vieron que era una oportunidad única — una transformación vital.

Fue un cambio de corazón para el graduado Michael Boutta, quien fue reconocido con varios certificados y un diploma en ministerio.

Animando a cualquiera que está pensando sobre el seminario, él dice, “abran [sus] ojos...hay algo aquí, que es mucho mejor que simplemente el vivir”.

Idioma sin barreras

El seminario Gateway también ofrece cursos de teología en español y los residentes de SQ aprovecharon esta oportunidad.

Tres de los seis que completaron sus estudios eran hispanos.

El director del GTS, Miguel Rodríguez, también es maestro para la comunidad latina. Hablando sobre esta necesidad en particular dijo, “Ellos son seguidores de Jesús. Queremos que ellos crezcan [también], para que usen sus talentos para servir a Dios mejor”.

Esta invitación se le extiende a todo habla-hispano que busca crecer en su fe. El Sr. Rodríguez exclamó, ¡“y si tú quieres un viaje lleno de maravillas, súbete! ¡Te equiparemos”!

Arnoldo Rivas, recién graduado del seminario, dijo que fue una bendición el recibir estos cursos gratuitamente y en español. Ahora anima a la comunidad hispana, “No pierdan más el tiempo. Cuando uno pone la confianza en el Señor, ¡Él nos ayuda hacer lo que parece imposible”!

El Arzobispo Salvatore Cordileone participa en los sacramentos

**Por Aristeo Sampablo
Spanish Journalism
Guild Writer**

Octubre 8, la capilla de San Quentin “Nuestra Señora del Rosario”, abrió sus puertas para recibir con mucho anhelo, al Arzobispo Salvatore Cordileone.

14 residentes fueron presentados ante Dios, por la mano del Arzobispo, para recibir los sacramentos de la iglesia: como es el bautizo, confirmación, y primera comunión.

Arturo Meléndez, residente empleado, compartió su travesía de confirmación, “Desde el momento que comencé a trabajar con el padre Manuel Chavira, él nunca me trató como un recluso y estoy honrado que lo mismo pasó con el padre Williams”.

Las hermanas, Aloysita y Sharon, misioneras de la caridad, se encargaron de preparar a los alumnos por todo un año y así poder recibir los sacramentos de la iglesia.

“Comenzamos esta clase en septiembre del 2022, después de que el padre Chavira nos pidiera. Él quería un curso que les permitiera a todos los venideros, la oportunidad de recibir los sacramentos”, detalló la hermana Sharon.

La viña es el pueblo de Dios. Interpretando de los libros de Isaías 5:1-7 y Filipenses, 4:6-9, para todos, la lectura comparó al pueblo de Dios con una viña.

“Estas lecturas son un



Dante D. Jones // SQNews

Edgardo D. Castro, 56, es bautizado, después cumplió con los otros sacramentos.

reflejo de la gente de Dios. Aquí, la viña puede ser vista como toda la gente de Dios,

mientras hoy celebramos la iniciación de estos hombres. La viña, cuando es apropiadamente fertilizada y cuidada, producirá vino digno de celebraciones de Dios.

“Aun así, mucha gente se aleja de Él, lo cual podemos ver resultan en uvas silvestres o podridas. Si usted rechaza los caminos de Dios, la viña muere hasta que la persona vuelva al corazón de Dios. Dios, es un Dios de sorpresas...las viñas privilegiadas no se les dan excepto a aquellos que veneren a su Hijo.

“Para florecer en la viña, tienes que aceptar a Jesucristo y serás fructífero eternamente. Recuerden que las uvas solo se vuelven en un buen vino, si cuidas de la viña

por medio de cultivar, podar y fertilizarla.

“Todos piensan que el fertilizante es la parte dura, pero mientras crecemos en nuestra sabiduría y entendemos, la sabiduría de Dios, entendemos que fertilizante – los tiempos duros – nos hacen más fuertes”.

Todos se llenaron de gozo al ver a estos hombres tomar estos pasos de fe, incluyendo los patrocinadores exteriores.

“Estamos muy felices de disfrutar el festín de Dios hoy. Hace un año, las hermanas nos invitaron a dar los sacramentos en la clase para la primera comunión y nuestras vidas fueron tocadas por la gracia de Dios y su misericordia”, dijeron Blanca y Alberto.

“Ser bautizado por el Arzobispo Cordileone, ¡¿Me estas bromeando?! Solo

en San Quentin”, expresó Gabriel Ordenain, residente.

“Celebramos a nuestros hermanos. Bautismo y confirmación siempre inspiran alegría para la comunidad católica en SQ. Debemos agradecer al Arzobispo por haber hecho el viaje y celebrar los sacramentos”, comentó el padre Williams.

“Me hubiera gustado haber tenido a mi familia presente”, comentó Ricardo Quisquina, quien hiciera su primera comunión y confirmación. Pero aclaró, “[Estoy] muy agradecido con Dios por darme esta oportunidad de poder hacer mi confinación y prima comunión...”

Al finalizar la misa, el Arzobispo compartió con todos los presentes, que regresaría para los servicios Navideños tradicionales aquí en San Quentin.

SPORTS



Resident Ulises James and his family got to have more than a normal visit when they met 49er Alfredo Guterrez and received Christmas gifts and autographs.

Photos by Anthony Gomez, Salvador Joaquin, Greg Eskridge // SQ Media Center

San Francisco 49ers inspire change within San Quentin during annual visit

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

Thanks to a sizable donation made to San Quentin by the 49ers, incarcerated people at SQ experienced the holiday season's warmth with gifts wrapped for their kids and families, while celebrating with part of the team.

The twin daughters of team owner Jed York, Chaplain Earl Smith, and key players of the 49ers were present in the SQ visiting room for the festive event on Dec. 5, 2023.

Offensive linemen No. 77, Alfredo Guterrez; linebacker No. 59, Curtis Robinson; offensive linemen No. 60, IIm Manning; and tight end No. 89, Charlie Woerner were some of the players sharing gifts and spending time with the incarcerated parents for the holiday season.

"To be able to tell my kids that I wrapped their gifts means a lot to me," said SQ resident Michael Callahan. He got to wrap gifts for his three sons, Isaac, 15; Ethan, 14; and Andrew, 10. After being away from them for over a year, Callahan enjoyed seeing the look on his kids' faces when they met players from the 49ers.

"This opportunity was special to be a part of," said 14-year-old Ethan. "Because a lot of other kids don't get this chance to meet the 49ers and visit with their dad." His dad got to watch him unwrap several items of 49ers gear.

The event started with a Q&A between the 49ers and the incarcerated population. The team players answered and asked questions pertaining to social justice reform, crime and punishment, and incarceration.

After the Q&A, the group took a tour around the prison. It was linemen Guterrez's first visit to any prison, though he and all the players except Woerner had people in their lives who had experienced incarceration.

"I want the Hispanic people to know that I am trying to represent them in the best way, I am here for you guys, and keep fighting man," said Gutierrez walking across the main-line Lower Yard. Many Hispanics surrounded him, expressing their gratitude for his presence and representing their race. However, residents of all races bombarded the athletes for autographs.

The 49ers Foundation, which supported the event, donates and gives back to over 100 organizations each year, according to Michelle, who works in the 49ers' community relations department. They work on issues including criminal justice reform, economic advancement, education, and community / police relations. The words "Inspire Change"

were printed on the front of all of the Niners' shirts.

Veteran athlete Charlie Woerner stood in the center aisle of the visiting room, greeting tiny 49er fans with excited smiles on their lit-up faces, holding memorabilia in their small hands for him to sign.

"It feels great to give back and spread hope and a new belief," said Woerner. "People deserve another chance. So it's nice to come in and spend some time with those families and those kids, and see those guys give their kids some gifts. It's huge, man."

Woerner and his wife personally did some extra shopping for this season and purchased some of the gifts that were given to some of the lucky kids.

All of the small tables in the open space of the visiting room were full of gift-wrapped bags. Kids were dribbling basketballs and running around with footballs, acting like they were escaping tackles.

The 5-year-old grandson of resident Vincent O'Bannon was elatedly dribbling the basketball that he wanted for Christmas, he said. And when Lewis's granddad Zy'ir O'Bannon asked his grandson how he felt when receiving that basketball, the 5-year-old simply responded, "Good!" He later added that although he likes basketball more than football, the most exciting thing about meeting the 49ers that day was when they signed his basketball for him.

Though an openly-expressed Dallas Cowboys fan himself, Warden Oak Smith shared his appreciation of the 49ers' donation and time they spent with the incarcerated. "On behalf of the incarcerated and staff, I just want to thank you guys for [your] contribution so these guys can give gifts to their kids, and thank y'all for coming out to partake in this event," he said.

The day meant a lot to resident Daniel Tolosa, who has been married for seven years and was experiencing being a first-time father. He never thought it would be possible to be in prison wrapping gifts for his first kid, and be able to give them to her. Tolosa wrapped some clothes and a video game for his 5-month-old daughter Issabella.

To put the stamp on the day, SQ PIO Lt. G. Berry shared some words. "I'm honored to be a part of this and I'm grateful. It's mind blowing that they would take time out of their schedule to come hangout with us and speak up on topics like social justice and the things that is going on in the community. It's great to see the smiles on the kid's faces. It's gracious of them to donate toys to the kids so that they can open them up with their fathers, that's priceless."

"On behalf of the incarcerated and staff, I just want to thank you guys for contribution so these guys can give gifts to their kids and thank y'all for coming out to partake in this event."

—Oak Smith
Acting Warden



▲ Resident Sadiq Davis enjoys the event with his loved ones.

▲ Twin daughters of team owner Jed York, G. York and M. York.

▲ Alfredo Guterrez (left) and IIm Manning inside SQ's Chapel B.

▲ Charlie Woerner socializing with residents in the visiting room.

"I never wrapped a gift before. It's a humbling experience being in this place and being able to give something to my kids makes me feel extremely joyful."

—Marquez Sherouse

▲ Residents wrapped Christmas gifts for children, items like footballs, clothing, and electronics.

Q & A SESSIONS WITH 49ERS



Rev. Earl Smith

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

The 49ers answered questions from the incarcerated about the prison system and how it impacts people while sharing personal stories on the day when they contributed gifts to the SQ residents. Team owner Jed York was represented by his twin daughters, M. York and G. York, in honor of their deceased brother Tony York, who started bringing team rookies into the prison with team chaplain Earl Smith. *SQNews* sports editor Tim Hicks and Vince Turner emceed the event, and after opening up the event held in the chapel, Hicks passed the microphone to Rev. Smith, and the mic bounced around from there.

Rev. Smith: “We really come in here to keep his memory alive.” [Tony York] “The weird thing today, I thought we weren’t going to make it in. I’m so glad that we did come. We are going to look forward to having a lot of fun with the kids later. We really enjoy the opportunity to come in here.”

Curtis Robinson (LB): “I have family members who have been incarcerated.”

Alfredo Guterrez (OL): “I, too, have a few family members going through this situation.

I’m glad to be here with the guys.”

Vincent Turner: What are your thoughts about the criminal justice system and what do you think about its effect on minorities?

Charlie Woerner (TE): “I don’t know a lot about the system.”

Rev. Smith: “Mass incarceration does not affect only minorities, but it affects anyone incarcerated, no matter the race. We are all doing time. Being detained, no matter the (geographical) state, it’s just time.”

What is the difference today versus 20 years ago?

Resident Jessie Milo: The one thing that has changed with me over the long period of incarceration is hope. I’m serving six life sentences and I did not have hope. I have hope today.

Resident Reggie Thorpe: The change for me was the advanced technology options that we are allowed to have today. Having that tablet in my cell and being able to call my momma.

Tim Hicks: What are your thoughts on the criminal justice system?

Ilm Manning (OL): I come from a broken family I was the only person to make it this far in my family. I do believe in having sports and clubs for kids, [it] bridges that gap between being here (incarcerated) and there.

Rev. Smith: Those

incarcerated have had opportunities to have coaches, mentors, and we turned them down in our youth. I need you to understand that there is not that big of a separation between the two. The youth and what they are dealing with and what the incarcerated have dealt with. The major states that produce the most professional athletes are the states that incarcerate the most people.

Vincent Turner: How do y’all deal with those who criticism y’all for coming into SQ?

Charlie Woerner: Even if we knew, we wouldn’t respond to that. People got a lot of courage behind those fingers, behind those phones, but I can understand a victim’s perspective.

Resident Dewayne Scott: I’m in here for voluntary manslaughter. The thing about being a leader is you have to have patience and courage because you’re dealing with youngsters.

Resident Coach, Bryant Underwood for the SQ 49ers: This is a great group of guys and I am trying to recruit people outside to come in and play. Some of your organization need to come and play a game against us.

Rev. Smith: You guys have unbelievable skills and unbelievable talent that God has blessed you with.

Tim Hicks: What lasting impact do you want to leave on the incarcerated folks?

Alfredo Guterrez: That life deals second chances. Take advantage of it. He then talked about his dad taking advantage of his second chance and how happy he is now within his family.

Curtis Robinson: That for me is the most important part: understanding the impact on them [family members] out there. Seeing you guys with your families.

Tim Hicks: What are other ways you guys give back?

Ilm Manning: Seeing y’all smiling and happy is inspiring.

Curtis Robinson: I was so naïve. He discussed his learned understanding of how hard the transition was for his sister being released back into society and how hard transitioning is. Understanding how important that phase is, as well as the rehabilitation phase.

Alfredo Guterrez: I can’t wait to tell my dad about my visit here and how these moments mean a lot to you guys. You guys are going to show me something that is going to stick with me for the rest of my life.

Acting Warden Oak Smith: On behalf of the incarcerated and the staff, I want to thank you for coming in here. It has an impact on these guys. Look forward to the rest of the day.

Charlie Woerner: There is a lack of strong and good men out in the communities. Continue to press on. There are a lot of resources that are available in this prison and you all should use them.

Rev. Smith: The only way a person could know that is by coming in here. You guys being here is the know for us being in here. Everybody wanted to know, how was it? If y’all could smile for an hour or two in the midst of this, that’s a good day.

Ilm Manning: You guys are pure examples and I can’t wait to go tell my mom about my visit. And now I can tell my brother how to keep his head on straight.



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Participants run four laps around San Quentin's Lower Yard to make one mile. Running a half marathon requires 52 tiring laps.

Half marathon sets tone for year-end marathon race

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

The runners of San Quentin’s 1000 Mile Club took another step — or more accurately, many steps — towards their goal of running a marathon when they ran the club’s half-marathon.

The 13.1 mile race was 52 laps around the Lower Yard, a crucial benchmark as the runners train for the full 26.2 miles marathon in November.

The club’s current star runner, Jose Fajardo, glided to another first place finish, leading from wire to wire.

His time of 1:27:19 even impressed Markelle “The Gazelle” Taylor, the club’s all-time best runner, who attended as an outside volunteer.

“Whatever he did was good,” Taylor said, who has gone on to find success on the national running scene since he paroled in 2018.

“Every time I ran it was dedicated to my victims and to anyone facing obstacles, which pushed me to run harder,” Taylor said. “I just want to cheer you [runners] on, support you — it’s part of the healing process. That’s why I don’t give up supporting people who are incarcerated.”

While all the club’s members share a love of running, the reasons why they run vary as much as the runners themselves do.

“I’m running to trim off these honey buns,” joked Steve Warren, one of the 46 runners who started the race. “And to find freedom. I just want to make it to the end.”

Wallace Jackson said he runs because it’s good for one’s health and because of the mental benefits. “It’s therapeutic, believe me,” said the experience runner.

David Richard agreed, saying that he runs more for the mental stability than for the fitness. “It keeps me focused and out of depression — I just love running,” he said.

For others, running is about accomplishing something difficult. “I run to see if I can push myself to do something never done before,” said Steve Matla. “Like running a half marathon for the first time.”

AnnaLisa, an outside volunteer, said, “I love sharing running with other people and introducing them to something that changed my life and can change their life too.”

When the dust settled, Fajardo had come up a bit



short of breaking Taylor’s SQ record of 1:17:47 at a half marathon. However, Farajdo averaged 6:40 minutes per mile and made it look easy.

“Jose’s running was really impressive,” said Tim Fitzpatrick, one of the club’s outside coaches.

“He looked relaxed and smooth, didn’t look like he was running hard. He looked happy, and that’s when people run their fastest.”

Rounding out the top five were Greg Stevens (1:43:54), Jaime Martinez (1:44:20), Fidelio Marin (1:44:48), and Mark Jorsik (1:45:54).

“Given the numbers of runners we had, it took a big

effort for the lap counters. The volunteers and [Club President Tommy Wickerd] worked good together,” Fitzpatrick said.

He noted that the club’s beloved, longtime head coach, Frank Ruona, is going to retire at the end of season after 18 years of service. “So myself and Jim Maloney and Diana Fitzpatrick are learning as much as we can,” he said.

In the end, 27 runners finished the race, and Honey Bun craver Steve Warren was not one of them. After making it 9.5 miles, he cramped up and pulled out.

“The honey buns won,” he joked.

TIER TALK

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

Known as “Salt and Pepper,” the number one and two guards of the San Quentin Warriors, Mason “White Chocolate” Ryan and Keshawn “Steez” Strickland are arguably the best pair on the team. However, the duo are leading by example, showing their teammates and the prison population how to gel cohesively on and off the court. They have done so through growth and perseverance through hard work and discipline.

Timothy Hicks: “Salt and Pepper,” it’s obvious for why you two have that name. (laughs) But tell me who nicknamed y’all that name?

Mason Ryan: Coach JB gave us that name.

TH: OK.

Keyshawn Strickland: It used to be the Dalmatians. (laughs)

TH: Wow, I’m glad that one didn’t stick. Speaking of Coach JB, he and others named you two as the best two on the team. How do it feel to have that title?

KS: It motivates me to be a

Salt and Pepper shakin' up on the court



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Keyshawn “Steez” Strickland and Mason “White Chocolate” Ryan.

great example on and off the court.

MR: Me too.

KS: We formed an immediate chemistry. I can trust him. We trust each other. We know that we will have good outcomes like that. The passes, the shots.

TH: Your coach also noted that you two are not only role

models on the court, y’all are doing positive things off the court as well. Do your basketball aspirations play a part in that too?

MR: Yeah, It helps me escape mentally from the stresses that come with prison. I feel like I’m not in prison when I’m playing with these guys. It change my perspective

of being together as opposed to situations when we shouldn’t be if we were in another prison.

KS: It gives me an outlet to channel my competitive nature.

TH: You guys have a good squad supporting y’all.

MR: It’s great to have teammates that trust us. We all shine together.

TH: Steez, you had a game where you went for 47, the most points scored in a SQ Warriors game. Your coach said Ryan went for quadruple doubles and you had the high score against the outside Green Team. Describe how you was feeling.

KS: We was losing and I didn’t want to lose. I had to pick up the slack when Ryan got hurt.

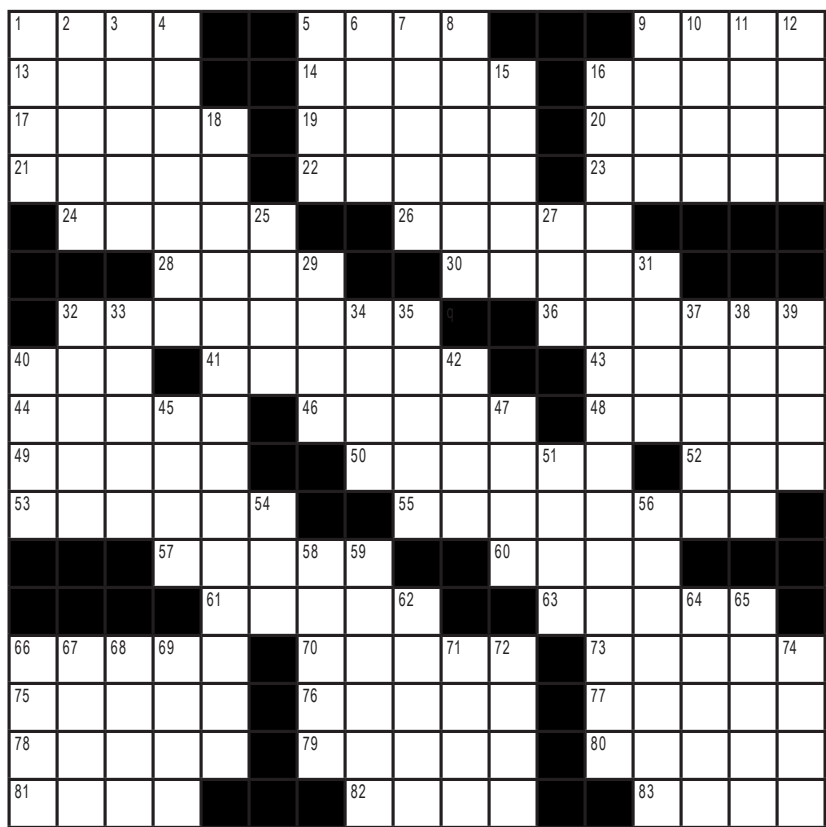
TH: I know that you both love to win and in critical times y’all know when to step up and handle it. What makes it all work?

MR: Even in a place like prison we can still form a family and a brotherhood. And these basketball teams in the program we form a brotherhood.

CROSSWORD CLASSIC

Created by Jonathan Chiu

Edited by Jan Perry



Across

1. One billion
5. The speed of sound
9. An ice cream carriage
13. Ancient Syria
14. Hacker on The Blacklist
16. Tree-planting day
17. Antique web connection device
19. Aquatic sub-surface respiration
20. SQ multi-cultural group
21. Your cell-mate's late-night racket
22. Follows the lieder
23. 280 characters or less
24. Agitates
26. Vietnam capital
28. "Sea spider"
30. Parents' authority
32. Green of G.S. Warriors
36. Thread of wire
40. "Saint" in Portuguese
41. Belonging to the abdominal append-
ages of certain insects (possessive)
43. As a matter of; i.e.,
"____ course" (2 wds)
44. Arrest (slang)
46. Regions of perpetual snow
48. Young women in college
49. Passion
50. One who saves
52. Albanian currency
53. Fibrous protein in muscle
55. A gland does this
57. Indian ruler to embrace Buddhism
60. City in Sudan west of Nyala
61. Sexually provocative dance
63. A fist or a hand (Scot.)
66. "____'s Razor" [the principle that no
more assumptions should be made
than are necessary to explain some-
thing]
70. The nasal passages
73. Guide straps for horses
75. "Mary Tyler Moore" spinoff
76. Home or residence
77. Mortise's mate
78. Soldiers' clothing, used for blending
with the environment (pl, slang)
79. Shrek's mate
80. College pastime: ____ sack
81. Greek god of war
82. Science of the body (abbr)
83. Former Portuguese and Brazilian
currency

Down

1. A shapely pair of legs
2. Batman vs. Superman actor:
Jeremy ____
3. Wonder Woman character: Gal ____
4. The land of freedom and opportunity
5. Military medical field unit; comedy of
the 1970s (abbr)
6. Played with a bow on a stringed
instrument
7. Orange or grape
8. Corpus preceder
9. American Indian tribe of Eastern
Montana
10. Double-reed woodwind instrument
11. A tonal sound made by a musical
instrument or human voice
12. Formerly
15. Heavenly bread
16. Creative reincarnation
18. "Happy holidays" (2 wds)
25. Alike
27. British attention-getters
29. Bear's past participle
31. Baltic island SW of Stockholm
32. Containing milk
33. Musical form with recurring theme
34. Navy cops (abbr)
35. Paris Hilton & Britney Spears are two
37. Singer of "Hello"
38. Unclothed images (pl)
39. Flat-topped furniture for work, study
40. Unwanted, unsolicited emails
42. Present-tense action of 50-Across
45. ____ Nostra: U.S. criminal organiza-
tion related to the Italian Mafia
47. A person who behaves obsequiously
to those in power: ____-spittle
51. Mediterranean port city of Algeria
54. In the present
56. Type of mushroom grown on trees
used in Chinese cooking (2 wds)
58. Hibiscus cannabinus; Persian var. of
"hemp"
59. Historic center of Islam
62. Pre-euro money of Estonia
64. "Swingers" actor: ____ Vaughn
65. Slender-stemmed, edible Japanese
mushroom
66. Killer whale
67. Scorch
68. Christmas instruction to "all ye
faithful"
69. Fusses or delays
71. Bart Simpson's teacher
72. The part of the pants by which impul-
sive people fly
74. Yard designation, prior to the end of
designated yards (abbr)

BOOK REVIEW

A DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME

A 1976 novel by Anthony Powell



By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Staff Writer

Anyone who has ever endured a goofy oaf, a bun-
gler, a clod, a complete bonehead whose sudden
and entirely unexpected appearance spoiled the
moment — perhaps a cocktail party, a romantic date,
a wedding, even a funeral — would know Kenneth
Widmerpool.

The prototypical Widmerpool exists only on the
pages of the Anthony Powell novel “A Dance to the
Music of Time” (University of Chicago Press, 1976),
but some people seems full of Widmerpools who
probably have never heard of Powell’s hopelessly
awkward character.

Widmerpool does not even count as the gigantic
novel’s main character, but he clearly remains the
most memorable one. Whenever the reader thinks
that everything goes well for narrator Nicholas
Jenkins, Widmerpool shows up and the plot tilts,
shifts, skews, or ricochets in a totally unpredictable
direction.

Did the author lose control of his characters? Did
the author stand back and perhaps play an anthropol-
ogist who did *witness* a spectacle rather than *write*
one? Powell did not go quite that far, for Jenkins’
self-effacement always returns the story to a ratio-
nality that allows the reader to continue in peace.

The novel has other unforgettable characters.
Pamela Flitton seems one of the most dangerous
women of all time, a person best avoided. Characters
she meets can only hope that she forgets about them,
but she never does: eventually, she victimizes them
— not physically, not financially, but socially.

Despite the title, the 2,947 pages have nothing to
do with dance or music. Much of the action in the
novel revolves around cocktail parties, dinner par-
ties, garden parties, and weekend parties in colossal
country houses. The characters talk about literature
and paintings. Very little else goes on.

In these interactions, Powell’s descriptions
astound readers with profound insights into human
behavior. Powell has vastly improved my ability to
read body language and better to understand the

unspoken meanings of social discourse. It turned
me into a Jenkins aware of the real Pamela Flittons
around me.

Set in Britain from the days following the Great
War and reaching to the postmodern 1970s, the
roman fleuve, or river novel, consists of four volumes
Powell called them “Movements” and “Seasons” of
12 works published separately between 1951 and
1975. Its plasticity owes much to Marcel Proust’s
epic “In Search of Lost Time.”

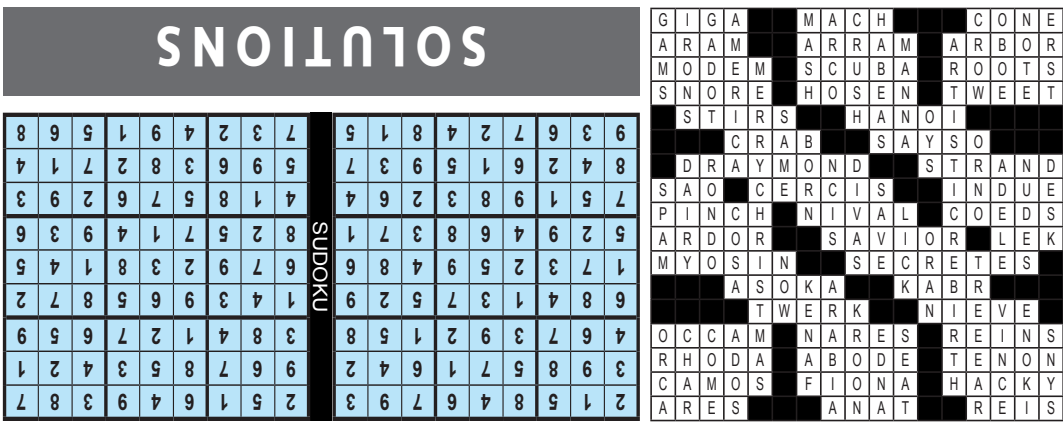
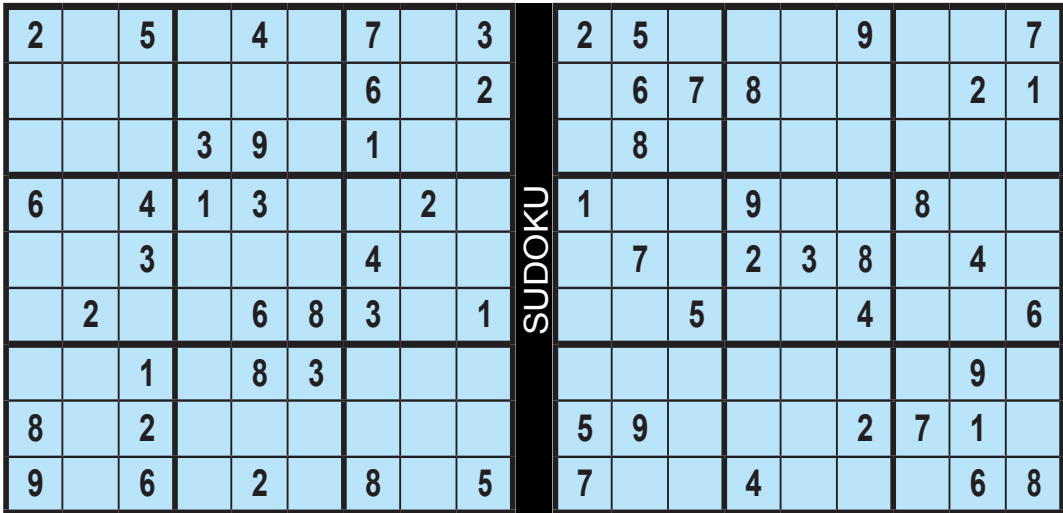
Written around the time of the 1952 accession of
Elizabeth II, the novel allegorizes the conclusion
of the slow-motion decline of the British Empire
— every Golden Age must end. Jenkins’s friends
Charles Stringham, a reckless aristocrat, and Peter
Templer, a passionate womanizer, personify the
decline.

Powell’s work has a writing style radically distinct
from any other writer. Jenkins narrates the story
in active-voice first-person point-of-view, but the
author rarely uses the first-person singular pronoun,
that ninth letter of the alphabet, which changes the
characters’ agency. Jenkins often finds himself not
acting but *re-acting* to whatever the world throws in
his way, like Widmerpool.

This grammatical concept raises the question of
whether any person, real or imagined, can ever really
act independently, or actually runs on infinite sets
of compounded re-actions. Bringing out such funda-
mental inquiries seems, to me, the purpose of litera-
ture; only great literature can accomplish such feats.

Powell, who pronounced his name pō’əl, died in
2000 at the age of 95. He had a close friendship with
Evelyn Waugh, the author of “Brideshead Revisited,”
my favorite novel of all time. Powell’s other novels,
“The Fisher King” and “Afternoon Men” disap-
pointed me. He also wrote plays and a multivolume
memoir.

The novel’s ending prompted me to read it again,
a second reading with much commentary penciled
into the margins. The last sentence “Even the formal
measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the
wintry silence,” always makes me wish for a fifth
volume about a fifth Season.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



MAN SHARES PRIDE FOR NEWS FEATURE

Dear *SQNews*:

This evening I was blessed with a sense of pride. In 2019 I was part of the “1,000 Mile Club,” located within the walls of San Quentin. While Christine Yoo was present filming and documenting we decided to take a still photograph of the club.

Tonight while watching the PBS Newshour, I was able to finally see that picture for the first time. Although, my time with the club was short, I will never forget the people who were kind enough to embrace me when I truly felt alone. Thank you.

—Lee Adams
California Men’s Colony
San Luis Obispo, California

APPRECIATION AND RESPECT FROM STOCKTON

Dear *SQNews*:

I enjoy San Quentin News and appreciate the tremendous effort involved, having spent six years producing Solano Vision, which, before its demise featured SQN features.

I also enjoy reading SQN’s editorials from the current Editor-in-Chief, and look forward to the insightful articles by contributing writer Kevin Sawyer.

—Wendell Bigelow
CA Health Care Facility
Stockton, California

RECEPTION MAN FINDS HOPE DURING SOBRIETY

Dear *SQNews*:

I just arrived in North Kern reception and found the September issue in my cell. I spent all day reading it and was inspired by your community and all activities you guys do.

I am a low level-2 and was hoping to get involved with your great community. I hope I get transferred to your location. I feel you guys have safe programs and excellent school programs.

I heavily want to strengthen my algebra to become an electrician. I dream about it day and night. I have been sober since January 2022, and I noticed I am developing positive goals and dreams. I hope the Warden there will accept me.

Hope to hear from you soon.

—Daniel Matteson
North Kern
Delano, California

A SALUTE, EXPOSE, AND GOODBYE

Dear *SQNews*:

I want to say that I really enjoy each and every issue of *SQNews*. It is really informative and has interesting

articles.

I was found suitable for parole for the second time. I really believe this time the governor will not refer me to an en banc hearing like he did my first time.

I also need to comment on the state of affairs here at V.S.P, as this is supposed to be the California Way. The program here is really inconsistent. There are YOP here that some of them are nothing but trouble and all they get when they get in trouble is a slap on the hand. There are older high risk medical incarcerated individuals here such as myself who do not belong here. Furthermore, as of September 2023 VSP was at 172% of design capacity, being the most crowded prison in the state.

Well, if all goes well and I am released I will write from the street. My best to all staff there at San Quentin News. Stay safe and take care. Thank you for your time and attention, it is appreciated.

—Timothy O’Keefe
Valley State Prison
Chowchilla, California

SOON TO BE FREE MAN DISCUSSES C.H.A.N.G.E.S.

Dear *SQNews*:

“CHANGES”

Most people reject making CHANGES because of the fear’ of adapting to something outside of what they have grown accustomed to all their lives.

Nothing about it is easy, and for a long time I was one of those same people who rejected everything outside of my “identity.” I found comfort in my belief system-not because I believed that it would lead me towards success in life, but because of my own ‘fear’ of doing something different.

Some people view making CHANGES as weird, and strange. Is it because it is against the ‘code’ or because of the ‘fear’ that is evoked from the thought of doing something different? I believe it’s the latter.

I have come to a point in my life where I no longer fear making CHANGES but embrace it wholeheartedly. Making CHANGES actually, in fact, requires courage, and through my own cultivation of CHANGES in my life, I have discovered true comfort in self. I have discovered Jaubrae.

By the time my submission reaches you all, I will have been released already.

After 9 years of being incarcerated I am finally blessed with my opportunity at this next chapter of life. Through the last 9 years so much has changed in my life-inside and out.

I was housed at CSP-LAC for 6 years and that is where my transformation happened.

I am proud to say that before my release I successfully established and facilitated a self-help group. I worked three years building.

The name is C.H.A.N.G.E.S. This experience has been life changing and I intend to expand to every facility.

As I mentioned this has been a journey of a lifetime. I had intentions of submitting my work to the *SQNews*’ paper previously, but failed to do so, for that reason I am submitting my writing now. I hope that I am blessed with the opportunity to have them submitted.

—Jaubrae Dixon
CSP-Lancaster
Lancaster, California

AN IDEAL PRISON: "HABILITATES" AND ACTS HUMANELY

Dear *SQNews*:

What would an ideal prison look like if it actually rehabilitated people.

1) (Re)Habilitation assumes that we were rehabilitated and can return to some prior state. This is an error in thinking. We don’t need rehab, we need habilitation first. Most of us, myself included, grew up dysfunctionally, this the need to be positively socialized.

2) As Craig Haney pointed out in re; prison experiment by Phil Zimbardo in 1971 at Stanford. “Prison must look as much like society as possible.”

3) As Stanton Sanenow, Ph.D. pointed out in the book “Inside the Criminal Mind: “If you have to lock people up for the sake of separating them from society, make it comfortable and humane.

Lastly ideal prison: no such thing the whole idea of putting people in cages is cruel and history will judge us for it, as we do the past.

—Grey McKay
Ione, California

CVSP MAN SEEKS TO FURTHER HIS EDUCATION

Dear *SQNews*:

My name is Eric Gonzalez and I am currently incarcerated at Chuckawala State Prison and have been successfully doing my time without any disciplinary problems since I came into the system on March 28, 2017.

I am writing this letter in regards to an article I read about a “Trucking Correspondence course,” in your August issue. This article very much caught my interest and I would like to know if there is any way that I can possibly receive any of the curriculums that goes along with the program. I truly wish to participate in any way possible.

I honestly believe this program will be very beneficial to the incarcerated population. Any type of information you can send me will be greatly appreciated. I would love to see this program expand to other institutions because I hope to enroll, if not while I am here, possibly when I am released. Thank you very much.

—Eric Gonzalez
Chuckawala Valley-SP
Blythe, California

EDITORIAL



Stock image

New year brings hope, commitment, change

By Marcus Henderson
Editor-in-Chief

First, let me wish you all a prosperous new year. It is hard for me to wish you all a Happy New Year, because there is nothing happy about being in prison. Prison can be a place of self-reflection, a place you can center yourself to find peace and hopefully that would lead us to redemption, but a happy place I think not.

As we enter a new year, we as a nation, as well as, the people around the world we are facing a lot of uncertainties, there are wars and threats of more wars, there are calls and laws to use incarceration to deal with the mentally ill, under the auspice of “conservatorship.” I am truly amazed how creative our government officials can get when it comes to fixing problems wrapping up the need for prisons in a nice bow.

Also there is a renewed cry to re-use incarceration to deal with immigrants. It seems the use of incarceration is the answer to dealing with any given city or the nation problems. In the mainstream media, we are hearing renewed screams of “tough on crime” and “tough on immigration cries from some of these same government officials. Well, what the hell let’s get tough on everything.

We are entering into an election year so we should be prepared to hear the same “dog whistles” of the past. We might even see a rematch of President Joe Biden and former

Pres. Donald Trump for the nation’s top spot, an old term conservative Democrat and another round of a potential divider in chief. What year is this again?

This is not a year of depression it is a year to renew your strength and focus. Think about, what you want out of life and not just the material things? What I come to learn while in prison – it teaches you how to beware of your surrounding and to adapt because people, institutional policies and rules can shift at a drop of a dime, which could mean life or death – punishment or freedom.

One thing I believe can get us through theses harsh times and mental stresses is that we practice community and be a service to each other. I truly have faith in those who care. Finally, as you can see *SQNews* is going through some changes.

Currently, I am temporary the editor in chief. I am proud to serve an interim second term, while our newsroom is experiencing some transitions. Not since the Covid pandemic had we had some key staff members parole, also some staff are preparing for the parole board. As an elder of the newspaper, I am honor to help train up our next generation of reporters and keep giving you all a quality newspaper. A new year is here and we all must do our part to bring about positive change. May your new year bring you peace and again prosperity.

Sincerely your humble servant.

CORRECTION

In the November 2023 issue, resident Tommy Wickerd wife’s name was misspelled in the ASL graduation article. The correct spelling is Marion Wickerd.

In the December 2023 issue, "Former SQ correctional officer remembered." Certain facts about her being injured in an institution riot after a Death Row execution could not be verified.

SAN QUEN-TOONS
BY JESSIE MILO (2023)



A COLOR WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS:

Robert Gomez shares his truth with the world through art full of vibrant colors



Gomez does not only work color. In a black-and-white piece, doves lift a woman to heaven as a metaphor for redemption. The theme reflects the healing of all mankind through the discarding of earthly woes during the transformation into spiritual creatures.

By Willy Alarcón
Spanish Journalism Guild Chair

San Quentin resident Robert Gomez, 55, rises early in the morning to create. With a colored pencil in hand, he renders imagery of birds and fish, the real and imagined, and colors both bold and subtle.

Gomez has been practicing his distinct style for the past 25 years, finding inspiration in his family and teachers.

“My brother motivated me to start my own art,” Gomez said. “He was my biggest inspiration.”

Today, Gomez still draws for his loved ones: his eldest brother and sister, his wife, and children.

Back in junior high school, his art teacher, Ms. Bell, would bring objects for her students to draw in class. She’d walk around seeing what angles, shapes, and shades each student saw in the object in front of them.

This introduction led Gomez to see the world through an artistic lens, and he began drawing the creatures around him.

“I love animals,” Gomez said. “I connect with them.”

Colors represent bravery for the artist; they become happiness and peace. Gomez loves soft hues but in certain pieces, he uses bold colors to accentuate the drama in his creations.

Sometimes, he just uses the color black and white, like in his piece of a woman being lifted up to heaven with the aid of doves.

According to the artist, it represents God’s love for His creation. It’s a metaphor for redemption.



ART

The woman’s body disintegrates, leaving behind every earthly malady — addictions, as well as criminal pasts and lifestyles. But she’s being transformed. The doves are the agents of change, turning her into a spiritual being of purity and light.

It speaks to all mankind. It speaks of healing, said Gomez.

With his imaginative drawings, Gomez speaks to the human condition inside the confines of the prison system.

His conceptual image of a fish inside a balloon is an illustration of life inside prison. Everyone is isolated, but meant to be in society like the schools of fish, free, he said.

The balloon both offers security and acts as a source of mental stress. It’s fragility suggests that one day, we will all be free and rejoin the open world.

Gomez uses his drawings to express emotions and thoughts when words fail him.

“It’s easier for me to find something in imagery that words can’t express,” he said.

The art flows from him, but he says this is a talent anyone can develop. It all begins with a simple doodle. When inspiration hits, the doodle can become a beautiful scene, he said.

Gomez encourages others, like he was encouraged all those years ago.

“Have confidence in yourself to know that if you put your mind to anything, you can do it,” he said. “If you’re having hard times, do like I do: pick up a piece of paper and express yourself in drawing. You’ll be amazed what a simple drawing can do for your state of mind.”



“Have confidence in yourself to know that if you put your mind to anything, you can do it.”
—Robert Gomez



By Anthony Manuel Carvalho
Staff Writer

Artist Michael Barker has infused his rehabilitative qualities into his art and has garnered a fan base that spans 30 years and four prisons, he said.

Barker builds trunks, cars and an assortment of other items by bonding paper to plastic and by hand sewing the materials together to make strands that creates his masterpieces. His artwork provides enjoyment and a sense of home for both San Quentin residents and CO’s alike.

“My art for others allows me to acquire more insight and remorse for my two victims and it gives me a peaceful way to show living amends while incarcerated,” said Barker.

Barker’s art career began after a Salinas Valley State Prison resident taught him how to make woven picture frames. As he learned the basics, he also had to learn the intricacies of creating the weaving material itself. After his apprenticeship, Barker’s imagination took over.

A self-proclaimed former “town twaker” in his hometown of San Jose, Barker now utilizes the craft to strengthen the sobriety that he committed to twenty-four years ago.

“My art helps me visualize that I’m on the outside doing something productive. It provides me with a meditative release,” said Barker.

Family also plays a prominent role in his sobriety, rehabilitation, and in the discovery of his hidden artistic talents.

“In thirty years, I have grown and changed like my art, but I would be nowhere without the support of my brother and sister who keep me going daily,” said Barker. “They have made me realize my art improves as my sobriety and rehabilitation grows.”

Barker added that his commitment

to reform included program completion in less therapeutic prisons, he decided to share his experience strength and hope in his designs.

“It’s funny, I never believed I could teach anyone anything, but now I try to share my talents with someone who appears as dedicated and humble as I was when I was selected to be trained by Hobby Staff at Salinas Valley,” said Barker.

“Anyone can put their mind to this craft and do it because I will invest in them the way Hobby Staff did with me thirty years ago. That’s how all rehabilitation must work,” said Barker.

From start to finish, one of Barker’s creations can take up to three months.

“Rehabilitation, like my art, does not happen overnight, but both are worth the wait,” he said.

“The things inmate Barker makes is incredible. The patience he uses to weave each work of art truly slows him down. He is a valued member of the SQ Community,” said C/O Brooks.

From choppers, to jewelry cabinets, to mirror frames, Barker will create anything. He attributes Avenal resident, R. Tiffin, with changing the trajectory of his life.

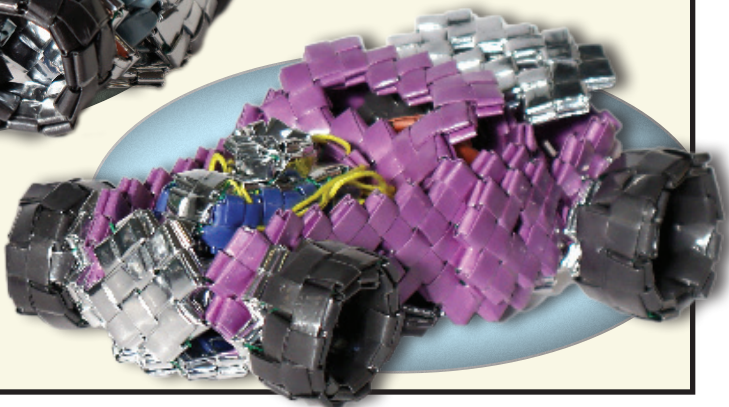
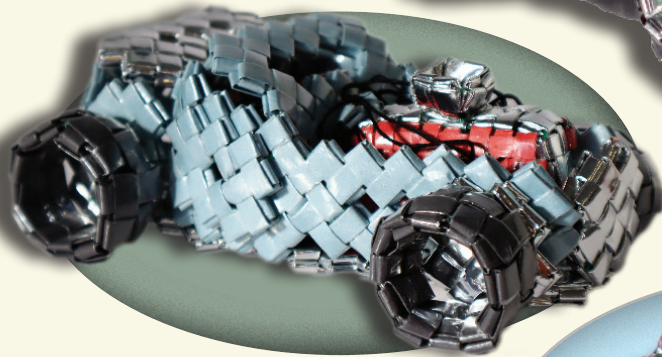
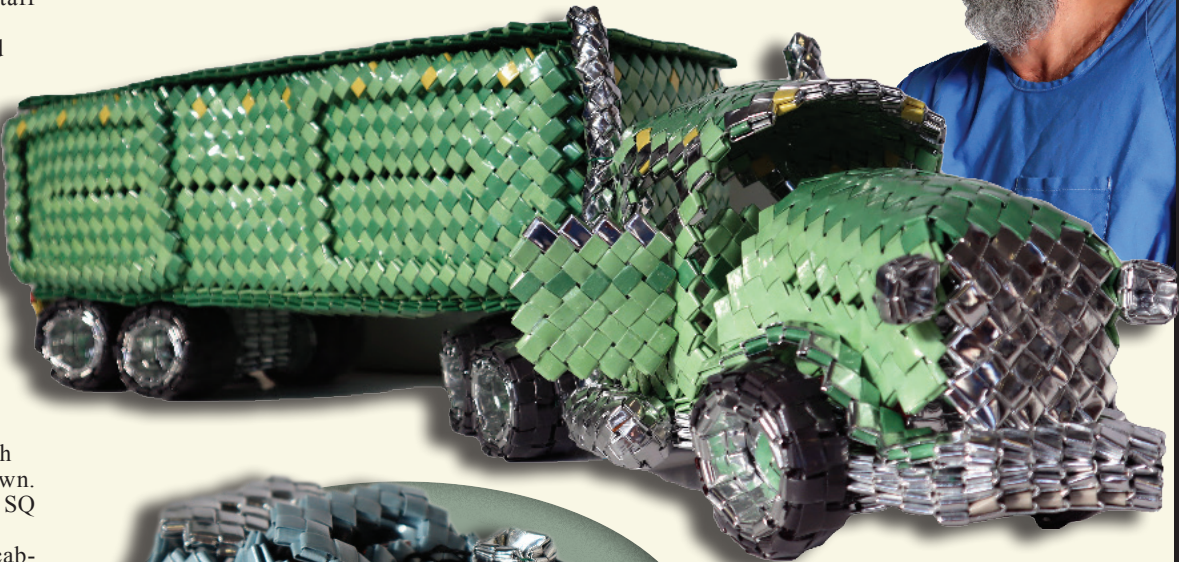
“Tiffin told me how talented I was and eventually I believed it. Today I owe others the same chance to change with the same positive reinforcement he gave me; positivity heals a lot,” said the artist.

Resident Victor Olquin added, “Michael does incredible work and anyone who gets a piece designed by him truly gets a one-of-a-kind piece of art.”

“The works I create, like true rehabilitation, take time. I am just happy I can improve residences, homes, and lives,” said Barker.

WOVEN REHABILITATION

Michael Barker weaves his art into his life-long rehabilitation



“Rehabilitation like my art does not happen overnight, but both are worth the wait.”
—Michael Barker