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POPULATION 2,605

Faulty drug tests impact thousands of residents



Stock Images

By Michael Callahan
Layout Designer

In January, the state acknowledged that drug tests performed between April and July of last year generated false positives. This prompted the Department of Corrections to review whether or not any incarcerated individuals were denied parole, or if their parole dates were not advanced due to faulty drug tests.

According to CDCR, nearly 6,000 drug tests in California were believed to have generated false positives and attorneys for the Board of Parole Hearings are performing reviews of individuals' files to determine if persons should be reconsidered to appear before the board.

"Whatever the odds of a false positive, is it worth the risk as a lifer to test when it could jeopardize your freedom?" resident James Daly said.

Resident Youth Offender Oscar Constancio has been incarcerated nearly 20 years. He went to a parole suitability hearing on his youth offender date and was found suitable. During the review process, his suitability was rescinded and a new hearing was set. He said he was told he had a dirty urine analysis.

"Now where I am at in my sobriety, it was a hard pill to swallow," Constancio said. He said that at his parole hearing he felt he had to admit things that were not true. "My life was on the line, so I took responsibility even if it was not accurate."

He said he received a notification from Quest Diagnostics months later that confirmed he was not using. Instead of filing for a new hearing, he said he decided to serve out the remaining two years of his term.

The CDCR stated the incarcerated persons' files that are under assessment encompassed those in CDCR's Medication Assisted Treatment program, Suboxone. Data obtained by UnCommon Law, a nonprofit advocacy group for incarcerated persons seeking parole, found positive opiate drug screenings in California prisons during a three-month period in 2024 rose from 6% positive tests to about 20%.

An UnCommon Law representative said parole board officials told their attorneys the review involves 459 hearings, as well as 75 administrative denials and 56 petitions for advancement, according to a Corrections 1 article.

"While we appreciate that the

board is reviewing parole decisions to identify which hearings revealed false positives, we are concerned that parole denials and reviews are still on their records and affect future parole decisions," Uncommon Law's director of legal services Lili Paratore said.

Paratore added that board reviews might not provide relief for everyone impacted. "We will need to closely monitor the review process and ensure the board takes steps to mitigate the impact of the false records on both past and future hearings."

Daly said he has a friend in San Quentin who has been going through an arduous process since the false positive last year. Daly's friend chose to remain anonymous but said as difficult as it has been, he understands why BPH denied his advancement for a board hearing, based on his history of substance abuse. "Because of the serious due process implications, I believe that lifers should start seriously challenging the Parole Board's access to our medical records."

Daly said he respects how well his friend is working through the process in a positive way. "For me, when things used to go wrong I would react in scorched-earth behavior. If I am doing right and staying sober, a false positive could put me in a tailspin," Daly said.

After serving decades in prison and doing positive programming, Daly said there comes a point where a person could feel demoralized and frustrated. "As someone who fights addiction and has a period of time sober, to have a mischaracterization of the person I am today and a fear that lab results could result in more years in prison is concerning," Daly said.

In September 2024, Quest Diagnostics sent a letter to impacted persons to inform them that due to a backorder of the usual reagent, the lab used an alternative for its urine

See **FAULTY** on pg 4

Jelly Roll brings hope for redemption

By Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism Guild Chair

Jelly Roll connected with the incarcerated at San Quentin in an epic performance that brought a sense hope and redemption for many of those who have spent years or decades behind bars.

Inmate Twitter spread like wild fire: "Jelly Roll and Post Malone are coming to The Q!" people shouted on the yard. Residents assembled themselves all around the Lower Yard and on the basketball court in anticipation of the dual arrival. However, Post Malone couldn't make it.

Jelly Roll's music speaks openly about his past struggles with substances and as a convicted felon who spent years in and out of the prison system since he was teenager. He motivated some of the residents into thinking positive, that they too can be successful upon release.

"This is a life changing moment because is an inspiration for me when I am going home in five weeks," said resident Nick Johnson. "If Jelly can do it, I can do it."

Warden C. Andes took the stage and introduced Jelly Roll to the crowd. "Hey San Quentin, how are we all doing? I want you all to know that today is a special day. Who wants to hear the real thing?"

"Son of a Sinner," "Need a



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Artwork by resident Erick Maciel

Favor," both chart toppers on Billboard's Country Airplay Chart in 2024, kept the residents singing along. In addition, Jelly Roll sang "Save Me," which reflects on a lifestyle of pain. "I am a lost cause, baby / Don't waste your time on me / I am damaged beyond repair..." In response, hundreds of hands reached up to the air while some looked up to heaven, a gesture of atonement for past wrong-doers.

He was accompanied by his guitarist, Joe Andrews, and assisted by Ronnie, an incarcerated person, who was on drums. Jelly Roll acknowledged his drummer's talent and thanked him for playing

See **HOPE** on pg 4

Reimagined prison system takes a step backward

By Michael Callahan
Layout Designer

Less than two-and-a-half years ago, California's Governor Gavin Newsom announced his idea for a reformed prison system. Now, residents said they feel the pendulum is already swinging back.

The state issued a 150-plus page report that contained the philosophical underpinnings and concrete ideas for implementing a new rehabilitative model for California prisons.

"I am still hopeful that they produce the atmosphere they claimed to at the beginning. The goals administration said they would implement. I see it, but I don't see it," resident Darryl Schilling said.

San Quentin's Warden C. Andes met with residents on the Lower Yard to reassure that despite California's budget crisis, the prison is in the midst of a paradigmatic shift from retribution to transformation and there are several avenues for positive change and reform.

Residents voiced concerns over long waitlists for self-help programs, lack of job opportunities for the incarcerated, quality of food, hobby craft, and medical response time. They also hope for healthier

correctional and incarcerated interactions.

Resident Michael Beaudette said that since his arrival at SQ in 2015, there has been a dramatic culture shift from general population to a non-designated programming facility. "I believe there is room for improvement. I feel we have taken a step back when we lost the Resource Team."

Beaudette said he appreciates the direction that the prison has moved toward, but said integration might not be for everybody. He said he believe residents need to do their part to eradicate their criminal mentality and hold each other accountable.

"Keeping people here, who don't want to be part of a rehabilitative model, should be shipped out. Some sort of contract or binding agreement would be welcomed by most residents here," Beaudette said.

Andes told residents that transparency is important and that the administration is working to create a mission statement and vision specific for San Quentin. He discussed administrative concerns over narcotics, laundry sweeps, correctional staff overtime, the future closure of more prisons,

See **MODEL** on pg 5

Fiesta de El Salvador event highlights immigration challenges

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

As fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and deportation cause disturbances in society, resident Edwin E. Chavez chose to raise awareness by hosting a dialogue about rehabilitative efforts and the challenges incarcerated immigrants face after prison.

Chavez invited public officials, prison administrators, and social justice community members to participate in a panel discussion during Fiesta de San Salvador at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

Chavez is an El Salvadorian native who knows all too well about how people are mistreated in a prison like CECOT, an El Salvadoran detention

facility, because this is the reality of his brother, Gabriel V. Chavez.

After serving 32 years at Salinas Valley State Prison, a high security level facility, Gabriel received a parole grant in May 2022, but he did not go home; he ended up spending two additional years in an ICE detention facility center, deported to El Salvador, and detained at the Terrorist Confinement Center, CECOT.

"It really bothered me for the simple fact that, yes, we are former perpetrators, we committed our crime, we deserve punishment, and we deserve incarceration," said Edwin Chavez "But in the course of [our incarceration] comes the journey of rehabilitation and reform, and my brother was able to do that."

As the event got underway, Elizabeth

Hurren, mother of the Chavez brothers, sat at a large round table at the front of the chapel. The room resembled a reception-style event space with tables and chairs scattered throughout.

The celebration was not all food and festivities, as San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins, San Quentin's Chief Deputy Warden R. Rosales, and former Community Resource Manager Lieutenant R. Gardea, who were part of the assembled panel, answered tough questions about immigrants and rehabilitation.

Resident Juan Haines moderated the panel, first asking panel members to share a little about themselves. After introductions, panel members received questions from the audience.

See **FESTIVAL** on pg 4

HEALTHCARE CONCERNS

Re-entrants struggle to obtain proper medical care upon release

— STORY ON PAGE 5

THEOLOGY GRADUATES

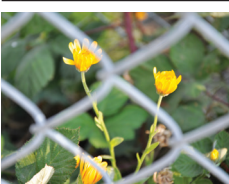
New seminarians recognized for achievement

— STORY ON PAGE 7

INSIGHT GARDENING

Gardening program has new name and location

— STORY ON PAGE 10



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San Quentin News reports on rehabilitative efforts to advance social justice and to improve public safety.

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REENTRY

Vocational article in SQNews inspires resident to pursue rehabilitation

Charles Townsend's journey started and ended at San Quentin

**By Kevin D. Sawyer
Editor-in-Chief**

Rehabilitative determination was epitomized in Charles Townsend. The day after he arrived at San Quentin in early 2018, he walked into the San Quentin newsroom and asked for a copy of the news article he had read about the prison’s machine shop vocation.

Juan Haines — senior editor at the time — found the news article for Townsend, printed a copy, and gave it to him. “Thanks,” said Townsend, and so began his rehabilitation journey.

“Even though everyone told me it was going to take one-to-two years to get in [the machine shop], I was blessed and got in in two months,” said Townsend. “That was because I bugged Mr. Wheelless,” the shop principal.

Convicted of robbery and sentenced to 16 years and 4 months, Townsend was initially sent to San Quentin’s reception center, where he became aware of its church program. He was quickly transferred to Ironwood State Prison and California State Prison Delano.

“Right before I left [San Quentin], that’s when the porters handed me *San Quentin News*,” said Townsend. “The paper was about two or three months old, but it changed the trajectory of my whole term, because of the story about the Computer Numeric Control machine shop.”

Townsend did not spend much time at those first two prisons. “When my [classification] points dropped, I specifically chose San Quentin for the CNC program, and Mother Jackson at the church,” he said, referring to the pastor at the time. “Those were the two deciding factors.”

In 2019, Townsend graduated from machine shop vocation. “It will allow me to go to any machine shop and get an entry-level position,” he said, adding he did not enroll just for the certificate, but to truly learn the craft. “With the certificate, I became the teaching assistant.”

Rehabilitation for Townsend did not end with his vocational trade. “I was supposed to start Mt. Tamalpais College in the spring of 2020, but COVID-19 hit,” he said. “The worst thing about COVID was I thought it stopped my progress. But during that time there was a growth in [my] resiliency. It made me more determined and more focused, and it gave me a chance to apply all those coping tools that I learned in my groups.”

At San Quentin, Townsend enrolled in self-help groups such as No More Tears and TRUST, where he became a facilitator. “I’m in California Re-entry Institute right now,” he said.

“I wasn’t able to officially start [MTC] until spring of 2021,” said Townsend. Staying focused, he graduated in the fall of 2024 with an Associate of Arts degree. Although he had not initially planned to further his education after graduating from MTC, Townsend plans to explore which university will best suit his educational needs through Project Rebound.

“I realized the only person in my way was me,” said Townsend. “This experience has taught me that I’m in control of my success; not the situation, not events, and not the things that have happened to me, but how I prevail and get through them.”

Townsend thought back to a pivotal moment during his incarceration in the Los Angeles county jail. While there, he reflected on where he was in life, and where he wanted to be. “I always wanted to be a good father who was there to support and nurture my kids,” he said. “But I was incarcerated, and looking at two life sentences.”

“I’m a much better person because of this experience,” said Townsend. He said he could not imagine being out in the streets, getting away with crime, and still being able to set a good example for his family.

In May 2025, Townsend paroled to a male community re-entry program in southern California to finish his term and parole. He is looking forward to rebuilding relationships with his son and daughter, and working on his marriage, to be a better father, friend, husband, and community member.

Editor’s note: I was in the newsroom with Juan Haines when Charles Townsend arrived and asked about the machine shop article. He was on a mission and never wavered in his resolve to be a better person. “I got a plan,” he said to me some years later. There was no foolishness about him, and I recall often seeing him with books in tow. I told him if he followed through with his plan I want to write the story. He did it with rehabilitation. Good luck, Charles!

Resource information

The following are resources intended to aid or supplement information available at, or through the institutional library. For specific resources by type or category, please submit your requests to your institution library or Counselor CCII.

**Board Recognized
Prep Courses**

PREP-Turning Point
P.O. Box 77850 (Spanish & English)
Los Angeles, CA. 90007
Reentry Course – 2Parts
40 Modules
Anger Management
Parenting
Domestic Violence
Cell Phones
Denial Management
Financial Literacy
Gang Awareness
Insight
Parenting
Building Relationships
Racism (Recover From)
Victim Awareness
Victim Impact (Sexual Assault)
Wellness & Recovery
(Substance Abuse)

**Transitional Housing
Options in California**

**PREP – Partnership For Reentry
Program Office of Restorative
Justice**
2049 S. Santa Fe Ave.
Los Angeles, CA. 90021
(213) 438.4820

Restoration House
4141 Solodad Ave.
Sacramento, CA. 95820
(916) 454.2068
www.restorationhs.org

Delancy Street
Los Angeles
400 N. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA. 90004
(323) 644.4122
www.delancystreetfoundation.org

Men of Valor Academy
6118 International Blvd.
Oakland, CA. 94621
(510) 567.1308

Db a Gryphon Society
1825 San Ramon Road
Atascadero, CA. 93423
(805) 550.8140

Reentry, Inc.
Reentry Program
P.O. Box 6804
Auburn, CA. 95604
(530) 885.4509
www.re-entryprogram.com

Catholic Rainbow Outreach
11419 Carmenita Rd.
Whittier, CA. 90605
(562) 944.2283
www.catholicrainbowoutreach.com

Human Potential Consultants, LLC.
500 E. Carson Plaza Dr.
Suite # 127
Carson, CA. 90746
(310) 756.1562
www.hpcemployment.org

**Neighborhood House of North
Richmond**
820 23rd Street
Richmond, CA. 94804
(510) 229.5000

The Trinity House
Transitional Housing & Thrift Shop
416 National City Blvd.
Suite, B
National City, CA. 91950
(619) 477.7155

**Free At Last Community
of Recovery and Rehabilitation**
1796 Bay Road
East Palo Alto, CA. 94303
(650) 462.6999

First Step House
40329 Stetson Ave.
Hemet, CA. 92544
(951) 658.4466

Quest House
2371 W. Olive Ave.
Fresno, CA. 93728
(559) 233.5096

Native American Program
Three River Lodge
P.O. Box 68
Stockton, CA. 95201
Gate Help, Inc

**Homeless Veterans Emergency
Housing Facility**
Vets Only
795 Willow Rd.
Bld. 323-B
Menlo Park, CA. 94025
(650) 324.2881
www.hvehf.org

**Employment and
Educational Resources**

Future Fire Academy
About the organization: A training academy that assists system-impacted people with a career path into firefighting and forestry. State certifications for a career in firefighting and forestry.
Location: Northern California.

Reintegration Academy
About the organization: A re-entry program that places participants on college campuses for eight weekly sessions of intensive life skills training, career development, and vocational education. Participants receive laptops, stipends, job fair access, and personalized support to help them enter the workforce or higher education.
Location: Based in California, with cohorts at CSU Sacramento and UC Davis.

**Center for Employment
Opportunities**
About the organization: Provides employment by giving participants structure, work, and an income post-incarceration. Comprehensive services include job coaching, placement support, and retention services. CEO match individuals with secure and maintain long-term, unsubsidized employment reducing recidivism, especially when individuals are connected to work within the first 90 days of release.
Location: Operates in multiple U.S. cities, including San Diego, Los Angeles, and Oakland.

**Rising Scholars /
Re-Emerging Scholars**
About the organization: Programs at California community colleges assist formerly incarcerated students. The organization provided counseling, tutoring, scholarships; help with financial aid, and enrollment assistance.
Location: California community colleges.

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The *San Quentin News* strives to include our readers’ voices in every issue. We invite prison residents, staff, and volunteers to submit their original articles, letters to the editor, and art for potential publication. Submissions should be clear, concise (350 words or less), true, and of interest to our incarcerated community.

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EDITORIAL

20-year anniversary of 'R' in CDCR

By Kevin Sawyer
Editor-in-Chief

This summer, I spent two-and-a-half months in recovery at a different type of rehabilitation center: California Health Care Facility, in Stockton, Calif. When I arrived, I was told, “Don’t drink the water,” because of an outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease. I was handed a one-gallon bottle of Niagara-brand water.

“Rehabilitation...” I said to myself. Then it occurred to me, July marked the 20th anniversary of the month in which former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger added the “R” to CDC, which created the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation — the place we all know as the CDCR.

Anyone currently and continuously incarcerated (in the CDC) before July 1, 2005, may recall the days in which “punishment” was the stated purpose of prison, according to the then-Penal Code.

Schwarzenegger’s envisioned transformation did not happen overnight, and punishment — through deliberate indifference — lingered. Weekly preventable deaths of prisoners persisted due to prison overcrowding that intensified medical negligence. The CDCR’s suicide rate rose to nearly double the national average.

Twenty years ago, both rehabilitation and healthcare happened in a leisurely and aimless manner. Change arrived slowly; soon, California’s prison system fell under the scrutiny of a federal court.

By 2008, rehabilitation was in its infancy and a three-judge panel convened to address the CDCR’s defective medical system. The following year, the Northern District Court of California issued its findings about the prison system’s

healthcare in a 184-page report.

The Court found the CDCR in painful need of rehabilitation itself. In short, prison overcrowding contributed to poor healthcare at a level that violated the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against “cruel and unusual punishment” and “deliberate indifference.”

The Court cautioned the state that it could not build its way out of overcrowding, and ordered the CDCR to reduce its excessive population to 137.5% of design capacity. At its peak, the prison population soared to 175,000 by some estimates.

Before the CDCR adopted rehabilitation as part of its mission, a life sentence meant just that for “Lifers” serving indeterminate sentences. The Board of Prison Terms — the parole board at the time — made it clear with one word: “Denied.” The year I arrived in prison, only 13 Lifers were found suitable for parole. I recall that most, if not all, had their dates taken by Gov. Gray Davis.

Much has changed in prison over the past 20 years, some for the better and some for the worse, while much about prison has remained the same.

Back to my stopover at CHCF. It opened in 2013, and from my limited time there, I can appreciate just how much the billion-dollar facility has helped to improve healthcare inside the CDCR. Is it a perfect place for one’s medical rehabilitation? Nothing is faultless, but viewing it with impartiality, CHCF is better than what was available 20 years ago.

The growing number of elderly in prison is one of those facets that has remained the same, especially at CHCF. They reminded me of those 13 Lifers back when I arrived, though more of them have been released over

the decades.

Unfortunately, the worst has already arrived in the CDCR. It is the ugly side of prison that rehabilitation has yet to pierce: the absurdity of prisoner politics, the foolishness, and the gratuitous violence at the higher level institutions. Simply put, this has been one of the bloodiest and deadliest years in recent memory.

In an effort to not sound too preachy, I will repeat what someone said to me at CHCF. He said the facility is the place “where gangsters come to die.” I saw many men who were probably “that guy” on the yard. In his day, he “put in work” and called a lot of shots. He was *the man* — in 1975!

Time and no rehabilitation placed “that guy” in a wheelchair. His sedentary condition has caused him to gain weight. Now he has high blood pressure while decades of hard drug use has afflicted him with sepsis. Abuse of alcohol has taken its toll on his kidneys; now he is on dialysis. A body and a sleeve of well-worn tattoos are remnants of his past life. Now that the wisdom of the years has reared its ugly head, looking in a rearview mirror, he has nothing but absolute regret.

So here goes my point: If you are reading this, and you were in a CDCR prison on or before July 1, 2005, and you are *still* the same person today, then you have wasted 20 years of your life. Rehabilitation or not, people are supposed to change — especially with age.

I was elated to return to San Quentin, the CDCR’s flagship institution for rehabilitation; and I was pleased with my treatment at CHCF — the other flagship — when it came to my healthcare rehabilitation, but I had to remember: Don’t drink the water.



Dear SQNews,

I just received two copies of your newspaper and I want to say thank you, it means a lot to me. I am a huge fan. I have been reading your newspaper for years now. When I am finished reading it I set them in the day hall. The other patients here love them. Thankyou for all your hard work.

Dario Perez
Napa, CA

Dear SQNews,

I have been checking out the SQNews on the tablet and wanted to send word to say what’s up to all the homies on the blue side not in protective custody. I am wondering how to possibly go about starting a paper over here? You know how that goes when a big homie starts thinking even though it is short time right now it gives me something to think about.

Curtis Smith
Calico Rock, AR

Dear SQNews,

On Saturday, July 12, fifteen members of the Skid Row Running Club had the profound opportunity to join the 1000 Mile Club inside San Quentin Rehabilitation Center for an hour long run on the track. This would not have been possible with out our club’s partnership with the coaches of the 1000 mile club-Jim Maloney, Diana and Tim Fitzpatrick, Amy, Mark, and others. We are grateful that Warden Chance Andes joined us. It was a day of completion, gratitude, friendship, connection, and possibility.

We were thrilled to see several starts of the film 26.2 to Life who are now free. When “free staff” go into a prison to volunteer, the incarcerated people are beyond grateful for the connection and support. It is a day none of us will ever

forget. To have the very special chance to connect with these men, hear their stories, and let them know that there are people who care about them, is something not many people get the chance to do. We were also treated to a special tour. It is occasions like this that make our club truly unique, and we cannot wait to return.

Tracy Hunt
Skid Row Running Club
Los Angeles, CA

Dear SQNews,

After reading your latest words about the “convict code... they were laughable. The amount of time a man has been in prison, nor how one got down to a Level II are not a thing that have ever defined a convict. It has always been about one’s conduct and respect. How one carries himself will always precede them be it to the SHU or the street.

The photo in your front rap (proudly) depicting racial segregation at the Q... troubling! All this time I have been under the false impression that the majority of inmates there want to change... and the cops allow you to group.

I suppose things are not always as they seem. One can’t judge a book by its cover, even if I claim to have read 500.

Joseph Moreno
Avenal, CA

Dear SQNews,

My name is Guillermo Alvarez. I am housed at Avenal State Prison. I read an article regarding the “parenting prom” from issue 180 for 2025 #5 / May 2025 how exactly it was pitched and approved. I am a “girl dad” (proud daddy of 4 girls), and would love to bring this to Avenal. If you

have any info to assist us here. @ A.S.P. I’d highly appreciate it! Thanks... and keep the amazing work.

Guillermo Alvarez
A.S.P.
Avenal, CA.

Dear SQNews,

Hell... My name is Meng Song; I been reading “the San Quentin Newspaper” here in Wasco State Prison. Here in R&R “Reception” I really enjoy the Newspaper a lot. I read February 2025 and March 2025 Newspaper, it helps me find my place and comfort zone of just knowing like how many prisons are there in California and such, etc. Is it possible if you can send me monthly subscription if possible!!! Thanks you!

Meng Soung
Wasco State Prison
Wasco, CA.

Dear SQNews,

I love the San Quentin News. It's entertaining, informative, and objective however there so much optimism sometimes it feels like reader needs to be reminded that “this is prison!” (tip) my cellie was operated on his back some years back and regained full mobility in his body. He used to be an athlete a feather weight boxer comparing in Mexico and throughout Central America.

His physical therapist gave him a back support webbed belt to wear and he can be seen during yard playing a vigorous game of handball. The clinic called him in recently and told him he had to return the back support brace because they had been told he was exerting. (tip)

Kenneth Nicholson
California State Prison
Sacramento, CA.

FESTIVAL

Continued from page 1

Brad Zukerman, an attorney with Uncommon Law, a nonprofit that assists incarcerated individuals and their families with parole board preparations, asked, “To what extent would you be willing to be participants in supporting pardons from the governor and petitions from the individuals [in San Quentin Rehabilitation Center] who’ve clearly done the work and rehabilitated themselves? Like whether you’d be active participants or partners in their efforts to get pardoned to erase the potential for immigration consequences.”

The question quieted the room as everyone wanted to hear from panel members.

DA Brooke Jenkins said that she understands why considering a recommendation like that is important in the current political climate.

“That might require some extreme level of work on our part, or decisions on our part that we wouldn’t ordinarily make, but it’s something that needs to be discussed,” said Jenkins. “What are all the mechanisms that we have to protect against this particular issue?”

Chief Deputy Warden R. Rosales is the first Latina to hold the Chief Deputy Warden position at SQ. Rosales said 25 years ago she was a caseworker assigned to work with the condemned population. She said working with foreign nationals sentenced to death allowed her to be a voice for the Spanish-speaking community.

As to the question raised about supporting pardons from the governor and petitions from SQ residents who have done the work to rehabilitate themselves, Rosales said, “There is so much that one wishes one could do. We already have processes by which we can recommend that people be resentenced to time served in some cases, where they can be immediately released.”

Rosales did not go into any detail about the processes, but added, “As to the consequences regarding deportation, I would

Platform for decision-makers to hear voices and fears of residents facing deportation



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Valverde Dance Ballet Folklorico

like to see a proposal to see what role we can play.”

The Fiesta de San Salvador event was the perfect platform for decision-makers to hear the voices and fears of the people who face possible deportation.

Incarcerated panel member Arturo Melendez said being at SQ has given him the opportunity to attend several programs that were not available at Pelican Bay, which is where he started his prison term after his murder conviction in 2000. He talked about how he held onto old gang beliefs until he became tired of what other people thought of him.

“When you are really ready to leave that gang life behind, opportunities are there. I just had to ask for them,” said Melendez, who added that his time in solitary confinement came down to him not wanting to look weak to others. “These [programs] really helped me dig into my past and now I am not thinking about my family, but my victim and his family.”

SQ’s Catholic Chaplain, Rev. George Williams S.J., asked that community members and the government recognize the rich culture that all people add to the world.

“Today, we lift up all undocumented people who live in the shadows in society. May this celebration be a celebration

of hope,” said Rev. Williams.

Guest speaker Alex Sanchez, of Homies Unidos, said individuals should hold public officials accountable. Sanchez is formerly incarcerated and told the audience that getting involved consisted of simply writing a letter.

“Today, you can get involved by writing a letter and sending it to your lawmaker or to Homies Unidos,” said Sanchez.

Resident Edgar Contreras said that there is no comparison between SQ and an El Salvadoran prison.

“I feel sad for what the people are going through with [the President’s administration],” said Contreras. “If I was to compare the prison in El Salvador to this one, El Salvador is hell and this is heaven.”

San Quentin’s Warden C. Andes said that he is proud that he can be a part of events like this one because it shows inclusivity and it creates the type of environment that people seldom get to see at other facilities.

“I don’t think anyone does it better than San Quentin. This is my eighth institution, and every institution has what we call prison politics,” said Andes. “At San Quentin we bring equal opportunity for rehabilitation for all cultures.”

Resident Haines agreed



Resident Juan Haines emceed a panel discussion with SFDA Brooke Jenkins, Chief Deputy Warden R. Rosales, Lt. Gardea, and residents Marlon Melendez and Edwin E. Chavez



Resident band Unico Elemento and guest singer

with Andes. Haines shared his experience working with the population, witnessing the different programs, and listening to the population voice their fear of deportation.

“The rehabilitative programs [at San Quentin] for me are unimaginable. They offer incarcerated people the opportunity to transform their lives, to become productive within themselves,” said Haines. “Then if you’re from El Salvador and you go through all of this, you may not be able to reap the benefits of this big transformative life and that happens. That is what’s happening today: we are judged by what we did in our past to determine our future.”

One program the prison administration supports is the

symposiums, where residents invite lawmakers, public officials, educators, and social justice organizations into the prison to participate in dialogue with residents at different levels of rehabilitation. Together, they brainstorm solutions to topics like the criminal legal system, public safety, the school to prison pipeline, and reentry.

Jenkins is one of many district attorneys who have sat down with incarcerated residents to address problems inside prisons and in society.

“What I have taken away from coming into San Quentin over the past two years is the ability to understand the failures in the [criminal legal] system and how to work with the incarcerated population to fix the failures in the system

as best we can,” said Jenkins. “One thing we learned is how little the resources are that are available to people immigrating into our country.”

Edwin Chavez said he understands that politics is something that he can’t control, but he hopes those who do make decisions can take a closer look at the rehabilitative work happening in prisons.

“For my brother’s situation, I know it is a federal thing when it comes down to immigration,” said Chavez. “But I think that it will be a good thing for foreign countries like El Salvador to come visit and take a look at what we do and maybe we can create some type of database so they can see what we have accomplished.”

Despite setbacks on path to recovery Jelly Roll's story inspires residents

HOPE

Continued from page 1

with him.

Race, religion, and affiliations were not important. This day he gave something special to the people at The Q. Those who themselves struggled with addictions or mental health issues felt blessed that a celebrity took his time to sing, to give his testimony as someone who has faced similar struggles.

Jelly Roll also sang Johnny Cash’s “Folsom Prison Blues” and changed the lyrics to “I am stuck in San Quentin and time keeps rolling on,” instead of Cash’s version, “I am stuck in Folsom Prison.”

For Erick Maciel, a resident and artist, Jelly Roll has become an inspiration because he was incarcerated and was able to pick himself up and become a success story. For Maciel, a lifer, the performance has given him a new perspective.

In December of 2024, the artist made an unannounced visit to The Q and Maciel saw him from a distance. It was then he decided to do a portrait of the artist, and

patiently waited for his return.

“I really wanted to make a one-of-a-kind souvenir from San Quentin with a quote that relates to his positive thinking, which is ‘never give up,’” said Maciel. “... You’re giving us a taste of hope!”

The singer shared with the crowd that he had a daughter while incarcerated and couldn’t see her and when he finally did, he had to be supervised by custody.

“For all you dads who are going through the same thing, keep doing the right thing and you’ll get home to see them.”

His message of hope resonated with those who are incarcerated parents. He openly admitted that he had struggled with addictions his whole life. However, he attributes the success that he found later in life and the custody of his daughter to his sobriety.

Jelly Roll reminded us that set-backs happen on the path to recovery. He reflected how he once relapsed but stayed focused on the relationship between himself and his daughter, which has helped him persevere.

The artist said he received custody of his daughter when she turned 10 years old.

After hearing the singer

talk about his daughter, it gave hope to David Medina, a SQ resident. As a dad, it pains him that his daughter experiences hurt because he is not out there with her.

Walter “the Rated-R Burns” who was in Tupac Shakur’s first rap group, Thug Life, is incarcerated and a hip-hop veteran at The Q. He said he appreciates the fact that Jelly Roll doesn’t forget about those who are incarcerated. He values the authenticity of individuals giving back.

Prior to Jelly Roll’s arrival, several incarcerated artists had a good time on stage lightening up the mood with “Sunny Days,” a song that talks about traumas and suffering from being abandoned as a child.

Kaomang P. Saeliaw, a resident who is partially deaf and uses a hearing aid, wrote on a piece of paper “It’s wow we can’t believe his voice, music very pretty. He has been in Jail. He learned to change his life. This event was pretty perfect and supports SQ. It encourages people to join together in song.”

“I feel like I am back home among my own,” Jelly Roll said. “Please tell everyone that I am coming back to San Quentin with my whole band!”

FAULTY

Continued from page 1

opiate drug screening immunoassays. Despite the alternative’s validation and passing of quality control metrics, more presumptive positive results were found compared to the usual reagent.

The urine samples provided by residents are meant to be reference points for clinicians to track progress, not for disciplinary purposes. However, the BPH can use lab results for a basis on suitability, sometimes without following up with the physician, confirmatory testing, or interpretation by a doctor.

“If they are performing a blood test or urine analysis to check some medical conditions, why would it also check substance abuse?” Daly said.

Resident Larry Ryzak has been incarcerated 40 years and said getting off Suboxone was the most difficult thing he has ever had to do. “When Jennifer Schaffer [former executive director of the Board of Parole Hearings] came into San Quentin and told us that we would test positive if we were on the MAT program, I believed I had two choices: use or quit cold turkey.”

Ryzak said several fellow residents still struggle despite

Faulty tests prove detrimental for several residents

being on the MAT program. He said incarcerated persons should be concerned that the parole board is neither mandated to investigate the validity of a positive, nor do they speak to the individual before the hearing.

As an indeterminate sentenced individual, Ryzak said he treated his addiction from a co-occurring and multifaceted approach. He said he acknowledges that Suboxone may work for some addicts, but he said it was the psychologists, 12-step groups, and self-help programs that were most effective. “Talking to the psych helped me. After kicking Suboxone I am confident I can walk out of here a sober person,” Ryzak said.

UnCommon Law advocates argue that the drug tests used for medical treatment include neither follow-up from doctors nor input on the incarcerated person’s behavior and provide a flawed representation, according to the CDCR.

Paratore said there are remedies UnCommon Law would like to see. She said people who tested positive during the relevant time period should be given pathways to remedy past harm. “parole board should not

have access to medical treatment records in making a threat assessment,” Paratore said. “At most, they should be provided treatment summaries written by clinicians who have the relevant expertise and context needed to evaluate a patient’s progress.”

Resident lifer Nicholas Kistler said he received a high evaluation on his Comprehensive Risk Assessment because he lacked accountability for a false positive he was unaware of. “When confronted with positive use, it changed the entire interview.”

Kistler said he has a parole suitability hearing in October and if he receives a three year denial there is a chance that his next hearing will have the same Comprehensive Risk Assessment if he does not file for a new one, which could keep him in prison even longer.

“One thing I am proud of: through the MAT treatment program I achieved freedom from opiate use,” Kistler said. “Accountability is the only way to be productive members of society. I feel forced to go against what I am taught; as lifers, we are looked at as liars if we do not own everything.”

SOCIAL JUSTICE

MODEL

Continued from page 1

singe-cell status, and the budget crisis. He asked residents to work together and possibly mentor somebody.

“If we consider the model is about trying to change culture, I like it,” resident Robert Tyler said.

A member of The People in Blue, Tyler said that as an aid to implementing a rehabilitative culture, the organization believes it is both cost efficient and critical to orientate new people upon arrival to the prison. “We should help them understand opportunities available and get them motivated into rehab and recovery,” Tyler said.

In March 2023, San Quentin, once one of California’s most notorious prisons, housed more than 600 condemned prisoners with an overall population of 4,000 residents. San Quentin’s programs include media, computer coding, community college courses, vocational training, and life-skills.

Fast forward: the current population is down to 2,605 general population, and all condemned residents who resided in East Block housing unit have been relocated to other prisons. A \$240 million dollar education center is structurally completed, the Upper Yard is being repurposed for recreation instead of the East Block clinic, and new boilers are being installed, as well as several cosmetic upgrades.

In the 150-plus page rehabilitative state-issued report from 2023, administrators, individuals, organizations, and residents outlined a human-centered culture of healing, positive staff-resident communication, and improved living and working conditions. Several of the action items listed within cost

little, are cost efficient, or are already in play by several peer-led groups within the prison.

The model centers on four foundational concepts; Dynamic Security, which is an approach to security that promotes professional relationships between staff and incarcerated people. Another concept is Normalization of Prison Life as close as possible to life outside. The most evident and effective has been Peer Mentorship, as shown by the more than 75-plus self-help in-building programs. Lastly, and probably the most costly, is a trauma-informed organization, which is accomplished by educating staff at various levels to recognize the impact of trauma on staff and the incarcerated.

Tyler said he believes there is evidence that some of the four concepts have been implemented but mentioned some concerns that cost nothing. “Ins and outs and building lock and unlocks are not normalization. This type of changed mind-set is hard and it could take several incarcerated and staff 10-plus years to see each other as human.”

Resident Schilling arrived at SQ in 2013 and said there has been a huge culture change. “The politics are no longer here. I see more inclusion. There is some violence but not like it was, he said he believes part of rehabilitation is associating with diverse individuals.

“All it takes is one individual that comes in and jeopardizes our program. Also, we have to address the drug problem through treatment and peer support,” Schilling said.

“We have to be different here. We are in this together and if we work together there is an opportunity for

a San Quentin model, a peaceful rehabilitative environment,” Andes said.

San Quentin has several programs that mentor individuals: Youth Offender, Offender Mentor Certification, Peer Support Specialist, Peer Literacy Mentor, Incarcerated Persons Advisory Council, The People in Blue, Offender Mentor Corrections Program, and several others that can help ensure every resident’s needs are met through orientations, annual or semi-annual check-ins, and pre-release preparation.

“I definitely feel impact of the model. There are many obvious proofs with the honor housing units and departure of East Block residents,” Rick Evans said. “But several staff have the same attitude and like to make a physical statement.”

As a Prison Industry Authority worker, he said he is encouraged by the joint ventures and employment opportunities in the new building complex. He said the prison is moving from retribution to rehabilitation through education, programming, and transparency, as well as spiritual, physical and mental well-being.

Warden Andes acknowledged that a complete culture change will take some time but he has collaborated with CDCR’s headquarters in Sacramento to create a safer and healthier population in San Quentin. He reassured residents that the Resource Team would operate in a capacity to continue the momentum of the current culture changes.

“There is a lot of low-hanging fruit that can be rectified at no cost. It is more about attitude. Budgets come and go, but residents can demonstrate the right attitude,” Evans said.

Non-designated programming facilities provide safe space

By Harry C. Goodall Jr.
Journalism Guild Writer

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has developed non-designated programming facilities in almost all its minimum and medium security housing units, depicting a California Model surge.

All inmates are expected to program together and comply with integrated housing regardless of general population and/or sensitive needs status, according to the California Code of Regulations, title 15, Section 3269.4.

This designation has added difficulty for some residents and is a relief for others. A question has surfaced: Is this an experimental study or pilot program?

“I feel relieved to be at a facility in which most people are trying to go home,” said San Quentin resident T. Beck. “People can be who they are and not worry about being pressed to be in or join a gang.”

There is no data that states that NDPF are to remove gangs in CDCR. Nor is there any data that shows Non-Designated Programming Facilities create safer or more dangerous environments.

Some suggest the adoption of widespread NDPFs could be a result of shifting views on security threat groups within CDCR. It also demonstrates uniformity throughout CDCR prisons. The more regular NDPF’s are, studies suggest better adherence.

“I don’t like that there is no screening process. It’s [SQ] a

non-designated place, but they’re still bringing active gang members here,” said resident A. Mendez. “Depending on the predominance, there’s still racial segregation. That was established before NDPF.”

There have been major moves toward respecting and acknowledging people as who they are instead of the old grouping of all inmates as one. This is illustrated by some classification actions and questions now being conducted by CDCR.

“It was the first time in my life I had been asked what are my pronouns. I had no idea what my counselor was talking about. I thought she was joking,” said SQ resident M. Mitchell on intake gender identity questions.

There are some who feel CDCR is better equipping residents for a smoother transition to society. This follows the California Model, which is a developing pilot program within CDCR.

“I’ve been on the shelf [incarcerated] for 30 years. What CDCR and San Quentin has allowed me to see and do is break old institutionalized behaviors, like personal space, or what I thought was respect,” said SQ resident T. Montgomery.

Many who have spent a lot of time on upper security levels find non-designated yards challenging.

“Because all that time on the other side made me live and believe a fantasy world existed – One that ain’t real in society. This is a needed transition on my journey back to the real world,” Montgomery said.

SFDA and residents look for solutions to prevent gangs

By Aristeo Sampablo
Staff Writer

San Quentin residents geared up to sit down with San Francisco District Attorney Brook Jenkins and her staff, creating a safe space for a dialogue on gang prevention and ways to build better communities for youth.

Approximated 70 people gathered in the Protestant chapel amongst District Attorneys’ as resident Edwin E. Chávez, emceed the event.

“Thank you all for being here today. [This] is a special day because it gives us the opportunity to not only be accountable for our past criminal behaviors through this workshop,” said Edwin E. Chávez. “Our goal is to be part of the solution and maybe we can share something that will have a positive impact on our future generations.”

The importance of the forum was to bring awareness to how guns, violence, gangs, and other criminal enterprises affect people in society. The event also became an opportunity for some visiting attorneys, community members, and incarcerated people who never attended one of these historic symposiums to take part in the conversation, for the first time.

“I wanted [the attorneys] to get a better understanding of how and why a person became who they were and ways to help prevent that,” said resident Richard Namex. “The DAs were very open and receptive to everything we said. It gave me real hope towards change within the criminal justice system and I am so thankful for that.”

The DAs and the incarcerated people formed a large circle where residents

introduced themselves by sharing their accountable for their actions.

Prior to breaking into small groups, Brook Jenkins expressed her appreciation for all the incarcerated residents who chose to be present. She said the topic of discussion was gang violence prevention and she encouraged resident to share their personal experiences of transforming from gang life to rehabilitation.

The symposium covered the following topics: How old were you when you joined a gang? Do you remember your decision, being a conscious one? Was there a significant or pivotal moment that prompted the decision?

Several other discussions took root during small groups.

According to one district attorney, the goal is to establish violent prevention programs in middle and high schools in an attempt to prevent kids from joining gangs.

Participants were given a questionnaire asking if they have denounced their gang and if so, why? According to one of the participant, he was tired of living that life style. He noted that he understood that he wasted his entire life being involved in gangs.

The symposium resonated with a first time attendee, resident Jose Navas, who expressed his appreciation and the opportunity to be a part of the event.

“I was impressed that District Attorneys want to come and hear exactly what it was we were going through before we committed our crime,” said Navas. “What better place to come and find real solutions other than the streets? Not all District Attorneys are bad; [there’re some who are] down to earth,”

Problems with continued medical care upon release

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

Subsequent to spending decades behind bars, incarcerated people are leaving prison with chronic care needs and are faced with deficiencies in the healthcare system.

In California, the volume of high-need patients is staggering. Prior to leaving prison, more than 18,000 former residents were diagnosed with high medical acuity, a medical term that refers to the severity and complexity of someone’s health needs, reported the *Independent Voter News*.

“It’s not the quality of healthcare that is the issue, it’s keeping people locked up until their health declines,” said San Quentin resident Jessie Milo. “We are at a greater risk when we re-enter society, due to our unfamiliarity with healthcare policies and procedures.”

Milo, 45, is a inside policy fellow for the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, which conducts the policy work to

get the California Legislature to address deficiencies and inequalities in CDCR’s healthcare system.

Milo said that this healthcare issue was highlighted by Marcus Wali Henderson’s death after he spent nearly 30 years in prison. Henderson, who had been battling cancer, paroled from SQ in November 2024 to San Francisco and then relocated to Los Angeles to be closer to his mother and children.

“People have died in the first year of parole due to various healthcare issues,” Milo said. “These fatalities have not been an isolated occurrence because over the past five years I have seen multiple deaths.”

Milo said he pays attention to healthcare issues because there are preventive methods like getting people home sooner, so they don’t die in prison.

After leaving SQ, Henderson faced difficulties in obtaining his medical records; they would have helped him

activate his medical insurance.

Henderson wrote a letter describing his experiences in his first 60 days on parole. He needed his prison medical records to verify his cancer diagnoses so that a primary care physician could make a referral to an oncologist in order for him to receive chemotherapy.

In the letter Henderson stated that when he was in prison he received chemotherapy every two weeks. In the real world he says, “I felt like a leper. No medical doctor wanted to touch me without the proper insurance.”

“I’m now seeing our dysfunctional healthcare system firsthand,” Henderson wrote. “I still haven’t received the chemotherapy, but by the grace of God, I survived prison. I pray I can survive this.”

On Thursday May 15, 2025 Henderson died from complications related to cancer.

The Centers for Medicare

& Medicaid Services issued a major policy update in April 2023 that gave states Medicaid waivers for particular healthcare services within 90 days prior to a person’s release, according to *Independent Voter News*. California was the initial state to apply for and receive a waiver.

In December 2023 the U.S. Congress approved a law that required states’ Medicaid programs to cover certain health services for incarcerated youth. This new legislation went in effect in January 2025.

As a result, federal correctional healthcare policies now emphasize reentry and continued healthcare for incarcerated youth after release, stated the article.

“As incarcerated people we know the deficiency in the system, so we have to be more proactive in our healthcare,” Milo said. “The key to surviving chronic illnesses is those early diagnoses. We need to get those invasive and uncomfortable examinations.”

Backlog of federal cases a concern for Dept. of Justice

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

The Justice Department distributed an internal memo calling on federal prosecutors to speed up handing out criminal cases, a reaction to disturbances rising from the ongoing immigration enforcement activity across the country.

“Across the country we have seen instances of rioting, looting, arson, destruction of property, assaults on officers (federal, state, and local), and obstruction of federal immigration enforcement efforts,” said the *CBS News* article. “[T]he Department has zero tolerance for any such criminal behavior.”

The Justice Department

said it respects people having the right to peaceful protest within their communities, until they become violent or dangerous. Several recent criminal cases of criminal activity included obstruction of immigration operations, assaults on officers, or interference with ongoing immigration actions, the report said.

“As we have said repeatedly, the Department respects the right to peaceful protest and assemble to engage on important issues,” a Justice Department spokesperson told *CBS News*. “However, the Department and its 94 U.S. Attorney Offices will not tolerate unlawful violence and destruction of property. We are prepared to respond

accordingly.”

The memo asked local offices to prepare for an influx of cases saying, “All [U.S. Attorney Office] leadership and the entire Criminal Division should be on standby. There should be no bottleneck of referrals for complaints and legal process.”

Arrests and charges filed against several people for interfering with ongoing immigration actions included longtime union leader, David Huerta. Huerta was charged with conspiracy in Los Angeles after he sat in front of a staging area to “stop the vehicles” during Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations.

New Jersey Representative LaMonica McIver, (D)

also faces felony charges for attempting to prevent federal agents from arresting Newark’s mayor.

“During her continued attempts to thwart the arrest, McIver slammed her forearm into the body of one law enforcement officer and also reached out and tried to restrain that officer by forcibly grabbing him,” said the article.

In a statement, McIver said she would prove in court that the indictment and the allegations against her are a political attack.

“The facts of this case will prove I was simply doing my job and will expose these proceedings for what they are: a brazen attempt at political intimidation,” the article said.

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2025

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Whether it is high-level training or treating incarcerated persons as individuals rather than criminals, accomplishing something can transform lives and reduce incarceration rates long-term.

According to Wikipedia, California ranks high in prison education policies for providing adult basic education, GED, vocational, and college programs. The risk of recidivating is lower among those who improve their level of schooling while incarcerated, which can improve poverty and unemployment levels. Nationally, incarcerated who complete education programs are more than 40% less likely to reoffend. "I see students who are breaking away from ghosts of past and recreating themselves for success," distance learning facilitator G. Young said.

In July, more than 138 San Quentin residents helped themselves overcome barriers to rehabilitation, justice, and reintegration by completing the Computer Related Technology or Vocational Plumbing course, or earning a High School Diploma, GED, or Associate degree. One individual obtained an MBA and an MA in Humanities.

"In this room there is so much passion, respect, love and a sense of power that education brings out of the individuals inside these walls," guest speaker Dr. M. Luckett said. "This community is a proven barometer for how education is important."

Hearing-impaired graduate K. Saeliaw signed using American Sign Language to attendees, with an interpreter translating for the hearing, about the difficulties he faced in childhood and school traumas that made him hesitate to continue classes. After 22 years of incarceration he said that CRT was his first vocational course and credited his teacher for not allowing him to quit.

"This course allowed me to become familiar and comfortable with

every Microsoft program. It helped me to become independent and educated in computer literacy," Saeliaw said.

Former condemned resident Tien Vo completed the CRT course. He has been incarcerated more than 30 years and was transferred to the general population last year. He said he last worked with Microsoft in 2004 as the East Block, formerly Death Row clerk.

"I have a sense of pride for the accomplishment and am grateful for the moment. I enjoyed working with others and being part of the community," Vo said. He said that he appreciated how the instructors wanted to make a difference for the participants.

More than 70% of formerly incarcerated people struggle to find work upon reentry into society but learning a trade like plumbing is a start in the right direction. However, even in states with laws that prohibit questions about criminal backgrounds there are still licensing boards that repudiate felons. But residents in San Quentin said they maintain hope.

"Prior to coming to prison I had no work experience. Now I know something. I have a trade and I might succeed," resident Gabe Madera said.

Several graduates said if there were more vocational opportunities in San Quentin they would sign up. The plumbing course offered instruction on how to install a dishwasher, a water heater, thread a pipe, and perform other service and repair work.

Resident Juan Flores said he was a plumbing contractor prior to coming to prison but he said the course was guided toward new construction techniques that were unfamiliar to him. "The instructor provided an environment conducive to learning. It was a good experience," Flores said.

GED graduate Malickie Davis said he moved around a lot as a child and felt defeated when a teacher told him he would never amount to anything. He said his initial reason for signing up to complete his

GED was to get time off his sentence, but gave credit to his instructor Ms. Lucas for seeing something in him that he said he had not seen in himself.

"I started to like class, school, and learning. This accomplishment gave me and my son a way to bond, going through class at the same time," Davis said.

Dr. Worthington, vice principal of the education department, said, "When I shake their hands and see the expressions on their faces, it brings up a myriad of emotions that emote all their hard work and I see an honest sense of achievement."

After 18 years of incarceration and opportunities afforded through the California State University system, Project Rebound, and CDCR, resident Anand Alexander earned his Master of Humanities from CSU Dominguez Hills with a specialty in Artificial Intelligence. He said he will pursue his doctorate upon release.

"Higher education is the real deal. It is exciting that the education bar is being lifted," Alexander said. "I have read that a higher education is correlative to a lower recidivism rate."

For Alexander's CAPSTONE for his Masters, he created "Heal Me Too," a consent modulation application for online daters. He said the willingness and vulnerability of offenders allowed him to create a support system and training so that as people date, every stage is managed by an AI watcher.

"This has been an amazing opportunity to use the history of offenders' punishment to create a project for a future of solutions," Alexander said.

Alexander said that at this level of education there is an extensive amount of reading on how people have changed the world from worse positions than an incarcerated individual's. He said that he believes it is impossible not to have empathy and identify with those who have been through incredible struggles.

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

As California's Governor invests in men's mental health, San Quentin residents speak their truth at a crisis intervention graduation.

Light Keepers, a SQ crisis intervention program formerly known as Brother's Keepers started in 2005, as a result of SQ resident Robert Dunbar committing suicide. One of Dunbar's friends put in a request to receive crisis intervention training to assist the community.

Struggles with suicide, are parts of life that people often deem too ugly to look at or too difficult to address, according to LK graduate Roberto Antonio de Trinidad.

"These areas are often left hidden in dark corners where they can easily be ignored and forgotten," said de Trinidad. "However, left behind, they fall into decay & fester, until they become the very cancer that come back from that void and bite us."

LK mentor Carrington Russell said, when you are assisting a person that's going through depression, this program teaches you to be patient and listen to them. Adding that the program wants to create a bridge where people can reach out and do not have to live in silence.

Residents and program mentors Mark Cadiz and Gregory Coates led the attendees with a grounding exercise as Coates played his Flute. Coates said that with this song he honors the Native people of this homeland.

Cadiz said together we breathe the same air that we all share in this community; "I share the same air as all the people in this room," Cadiz said.

LK mentor Michael Keeeyes has been a member since 2017, he said in 2023 the title of the program was changed from Brother's Keepers to Light Keepers as a form of inclusivity.

Resident crisis prevention team seeks to make impact



Light Keepers alum, staff, and graduates

Photo by Aristeo Sampaio // SQNews

"Light Keepers is community care, I've known people that has been depressed. Some of the residents have been in prison a long time, and I want to be supportive, a source of encouragement," Keeeyes said.

He added that his account of a suicidal event encouraged him to join the program.

He had a cellmate that got into a verbal confrontation with a correctional officer, because chow was being delayed. As a result their cell was searched, and his cellmates personal belongings was left in shambles as a result.

"I gave him some space to straighten up his things," said Keeeyes. "When I returned he had slit his own throat, but he survived."

Resident and current LK member Sergio

Alvarez said that he reached out to God, and then to others, and that there is universal truth to comfort those with the comfort they have been given.

"I hurt a lot of people in my life; I found myself in a place of hurt. I was in a dark place. I was suffering, now I want to listen to you," Alvarez told the audience. "I am hear for you which has set me free, giving me the courage to hold space for someone else."

Resident participant Bert Gauthier completed the crisis intervention program, but he reflected on the mental struggles of others, feeling he could have been of assistance.

Prior to Gauthier joining the LK program there were two suicides in SQ's South Block,

he wondered did he pass them on the yard, could he have intervened and talk but mostly listened to them.

SQ LK graduate Amos Carter competed the crisis intervention training, he spoke about why he became a Light Keeper.

He wants to be the one that bears the light of hope, and to teach others how to do the same. As a dedication to the graduates Carter performed a solo titled "You got a Friend," as he played the electric piano.

"When you need some loving and care, and nothing is going right. Just close your eyes and think of me, I'll be there," he sang.

Former SQ resident Borey Peejay Ai addressed the crowd concerning his own experiences during time he spent in immigration detention.

He said that people do not know how hard it is to talk to people who are at a vulnerable place in their life. Adding that when he paroled Immigration Customs Enforcement picked him up; being in federal detention a person doesn't know when they're going home.

Ai added that in dealing with hardships such as being in Federal Detention, a person could make a decision that will impact the rest of their life.

He said, with community support he was released and began the work on the outside as a Light Keeper. Ai now works at a clinic in Oakland California with the elders in his community.

"This group is the most powerful part of this community. I am very grateful for the group members patience," said SQ's Suicide Prevention Coordinator Dr. E. Anderson. "You have grown in a way that makes me proud of you. I believe in you and I am honored to have known you all."

Gun violence discussions held at Arms Down graduation

By Kevin D. Sawyer
Editor-in-Chief

Arms Down, a mutual-help group addressing firearm addiction, recognized its latest cohort of graduates in an uncommon violence intervention-type ceremony at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center in August.

Speakers on a panel discussed the seriousness of gun violence, instead of a predictable stroll to the stage *Pomp & Circumstance*. The institution's Chapel B held a blend of family, friends, outside guests, staff, and public safety officials who listened to strategies on how to dismantle beliefs that would lead someone to use a firearm to harm someone or even take a life.

"There's always options, but due to our beliefs, we don't use them," said Jessie Milo, co-creator of Arms Down and host of the event. "The irony is that carrying a gun makes us less safe."

The program addressed the problem of America's firearm addiction and the subsequent violence when one uses a gun. Some of the best persons to offer solutions are those with lived experiences—those convicted of firearm offenses. They came together to discuss community solutions to end gun violence.

Greg Fidell, a gun violence prevention advocate and senior manager at the Brady Center, said a billion-dollar gun industry profits from gun violence. He told the audience that California spends roughly \$130,000 to incarcerate one person for one year. He said it cost some \$13 million a year to house the approximately 100 participants in this event, but their incarceration did not make him feel safer.

"This [Arms Down] class makes me feel safe," said Fidell. "You are all making California safer. Let's address the root cause of gun violence in this country."

Milo said, "At night, in many of our cities, we can hear gunshots like heartbeats. But it's not hearts beating. It's hearts stopping; the hearts of brothers and sisters across our nation." He proffered, "Through my experience over the last decade doing trauma work, I've identified a correlation between experiencing firearm-related trauma and becoming a gun offender."

As a prosecutor, Brooke Jenkins, San Francisco's district attorney said, "I'm probably the least likely person to be here." But she has supported the program from its inception. This was not her first Arms Down gathering.

San Quentin's Warden Chance Andes attended the event, as did several Board of Parole Hearings commissioners, and Public Safety Secretary Michael Redding from the Office of the Governor.

Arms Down is the brainchild of Jemain Hunter. He conceived the idea after feeling indifferent toward other self-help groups that failed to address the root cause of gun violence. "It's about public safety," he said.

After the panel took the stage to discuss public safety, solutions to gun violence, toxic masculinity, and advice for youth in America, the panelists addressed the question, "What is the biggest lie about guns?"

Arms Down's co-creator Carlos Valdez said the lie he learned about a gun had told him, "It's for protection." After two decades of

incarceration, he has a different view. "It's your choice and you don't have to take revenge."

Others on the panel echoed similar sentiments about carrying a firearm.

"We think we're alone when we use a gun," said George Coles-El, another Arms Down co-creator. "It's all about choices. But a choice I don't know is a choice I don't have."

Arms Down secretary and co-creator Christopher Christensen said he used to believe the big lie that told him that "If you pull it, you have to use it."

After listening people on the panel give their reasons to carry firearms, Redding said, "We can invest in violence intervention. Society and government should not place people in a position where they feel a gun is needed."

District Attorney Jenkins has visited San Quentin at least a dozen times in recent years. Asked about what her office has done to prevent gun violence, she responded, "My office wasn't doing anything but prosecuting." She added that her office has since begun to employ intervention, underscoring that her role as a public safety official gives her a duty to prevent crime before it occurs — instead of prosecution after the fact.

"I'm highly supportive of making sure [Arms Down] gets replicated outside," said Jenkins. She suggested that enrolling some firearm offenders in an Arms Down course on the outside might make an effective condition of probation. To the possible offenders, she said, "You can be seen, and you can be heard without it being on the inside of a courtroom."

Lunch and awarding certificates to the graduates amounted to more of an afterthought as everyone agreed that much work still lay ahead to provide feasible solutions to gun violence.

School of Theology graduates seven residents

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Resident Damou Evans, one of seven to graduate from the North Bay School of Theology at San Quentin, said he joined the program to be a leader, not only in the community, but also in his family.

The 14-week advanced theology program provides contextualized leadership development to residents interested in putting God first as they gain insight, work through conflicts, and build relationships using the Bible as a teaching guide. Reverend Cornell Swain of Gateway Seminary hosted the commencement ceremony and handed out diplomas to graduates who were accompanied by invited guests and family members.

The three reverends who sponsored the advanced class each shared words of appreciation for the graduates as they presented them with

their certificates.

Reverend Miguel Rodriguez spoke on behalf of residents Pedro Ibanez, Nazario Jeronimo Izara, and Jorge Alberto Ramos Coella.

When he introduced Jorge, Rodriguez said he was touched by Jorge's sensitivity to the Lord.

"It's a privilege for me to present Brother Jorge with this certificate simply because I have been touched by his sensitivity to the Lord and his desire to apply the Word to his life," said Rodriguez.

"Pedro is a little quiet," Rodriguez said, "but when he says something he speaks from the heart. May the Lord continue to bless him and his family."

"We are thankful for Nazario's efforts, and Lord we pray for the continued blessing for him and his family," said Rodriguez. "Today, I am honored to be presenting these gentlemen with their Christian Ministry Certifications."

When Swain presented a certificate to resident

Damou Joseph Evans, he called it his honor.

"I believe that I have had the honor and privilege to steward and be a part of you getting wisdom. It hasn't been about getting the wisdom and knowledge, it has really been about transformation," Swain said about resident Evans.

As he presented the certificate to Timothy Young, Swain said that Timothy has been one of the longest and committed participants of the program.

"For a little context of Brother Timothy, he has come before us when we started seminary in 2008. He was there in 2011 and 2012. He was also taught by many of [my] predecessors," Swain said.

Reverend Bob Lawler presented Tristan Lynch with his certificate, noting Lynch's commitment and calling it genuine.

"Tristan is committed to getting it all and in order to get it all, you have to be a person with

a lot of questions. He is an excellent student because he keeps on asking questions," Lawler said. "He doesn't just do it for knowledge and he doesn't just want to know it all, he wants to do it all for the Glory of God."

Rodriguez, director of North Bay School of Theology, acknowledged graduates for attending the advanced program which is only available at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

Rodriguez said that humans have four basic needs: acceptance, security, identity, and purpose.

As the ceremony came to a close, Rodriguez presented the graduates with a call to action: accept God. He read Psalms 16:7-11 and ended with some motivation for tough times.

"In life there will be storms and I want to remind you of your true north," said Rodriguez. "My hope is that in difficult times, good or bad, that you will have the strength to go forward."



Arms Down inside team with SFDA Brooke Jenkins and Public Safety Secretary Michael Redding from the Office of the Governor

Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

El ser encerrado injustamente en el CECOT

Por Marco Serna
Spanish Journalism
Guild Writer

Los salvadoreños encarcelados proponen un diálogo contra dictadura de El Salvador compartieron además su cultura y comida típica, [Pupusas y Tamales] acompañados de seres queridos e invitados de la comunidad Hispana en San Quentin.

El evento inicio con una misa en español en la capilla católica, dirigida por el Padre Armando Gutiérrez de la arquidiócesis de San Francisco originario del Salvador y miembro del Ministerio de Justicia Restaurativa.

Las fiestas Agostinas son una tradición Salvadoreña desde el siglo XVI, celebrando la transfiguración de Jesús Cristo — algo que Pedro de Alvarado, un conquistador español nombro una isla; El Salvador Del Mundo, según un reporte de *National Today*.

Edwin E. Chavez residente de SQ. y anfitrión, destacó la importancia del evento, pidiendo que miraran a su alrededor y expresó “Esto es como la rehabilitación trabaja”, dando gracias a todos los invitados quienes asistieron.

El Director del Centro de Rehabilitación C. Andes, se mostró honrado al compartir este festejo con todos los presentes. Reconociendo el trabajo de todos los participantes. “No creo que nadie lo hace mejor que SQ., Veo al rededor, y observo la diversidad [en la capilla] y también veo el apoyo de otras culturas que es verdaderamente increíble”.

El sacerdote George Williams dedico la misa a las personas quienes están encarceladas en las prisiones de latino america, específicamente en CECOT.

Las banderas de EE.UU., El Salvador y California, fueron presentadas por la escolta de los Veteranos de SQ, El Himno de El Salvador fue entonado por dos reclusos salvadoreños, honrando a las dos naciones.

Durante la festividad, el grupo de Danza Folclórico Valverde fueron invitados para participar en este evento. Cuāuhocēloti el grupo de danza de SQ., quienes participaron también para dar cierre a las danzas culturales.

Además los salvadoreños y centro americanos resaltaron el cambio y el esfuerzo de la rehabilitación. Mucho de ellos han estado encarcelados desde la adolescencia— décadas después, han alcanzado la madurez, transformación y

el remordimiento por todo el dolor que han causado a sus víctimas y sobrevivientes.

Este evento fue dedicado a todos los presos del estado de California y la nación americana. “No importa si estas en Folsom, Pelican Bay, Calipratia, High Desert, Corcoran, Presant Valley o cualquier otra institución, ustedes están en nuestro corazón”, señaló Chavez.

Julio Escobar, director ejecutivo del Ministerio de Justicia Restaurativa, compartió cómo antes las pandillas no convivían; haciendo una división entre ellos. Él es testigo que en SQ., se está trabajando en estar unidos y alejados de la violencia, “Dios viene primero, y por eso es que ayudamos a la gente porque es de humanos hacerlo”.

La Sra. Esperanza Navas quien también es miembro del comité de Ministerio de Justicia Restaurativa, contó como su único hijo de nombre Ángel Miguel Serrano fue asesinado por un disparo y su muerte, a causa de las pandillas. Según ella su hijo buscó ayuda ante su asesinato.

“Mi mensaje es que no tiren la toalla de ambos lados, porque Dios tiene algo mejor para todos”, dijo Navas hablando de su experiencia actual al ayudar a los jóvenes de la comunidad.

Juan Moreno Haines periodista encarcelado de SQ, fue el moderador durante los diálogos, señalando los temas más importantes; refiriéndose a lo que está pasando con los residentes rehabilitados, siendo elegibles para su audiencia de libertad condicional, tras su liberación son entregados a inmigración, deportados a sus países de origen, puestos en detenciones y en algunos casos sufren malos tratos.

La fiscal Brooke Jenkins, de padre Salvadoreño, comentó que durante los procesos judiciales, los fiscales solo tienen una idea, basado en lo descrito en sus archivos de los acusados, ellos nunca tienen la oportunidad de conocer sus historias.

Jenkins está al tanto con la situación en El Salvador, según ella ha estado en contacto con Chavez sobre la historia de su hermano, comentando del miedo y dificultades de personas al ser deportadas después de cumplir su sentencia, especialmente a los que han estado desde niños, expresó que la fiscalía de San Francisco tiene representantes que están abogando por esa comunidad, porque ella dice; “El miedo es real”.

La Corte Penal Internacional



Above: Resident Aztec Dancers Below left: Archdiocese of San Francisco RJM Julio Escobar, Below right: Valverde Dance Ballet Folklorico



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

recibió una denuncia formal contra el Presidente de El Salvador, por presuntas faltas contra los derechos humanos desaparición forzada, tortura sistemática y muertes en centros penitenciarios; bajo la custodia estatal, de acuerdo a una actualización de parte de la *Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*.

Arturo Meléndez residente de SQ, quien está sirviendo una condena de 50 años a cadena perpetua, comento como él era una persona con “creencias equivocadas, violentas y furiosas”, ingresando a la prisión en su adolescencia, continuando con una vida de pandillas por mucho tiempo; poniendo su vida y la de su familia en peligro.

Meléndez llegó a un punto donde recapacito y decidió cambiar su vida, y seguir el camino de Dios. Empezando su camino a la rehabilitación, participando en programas en los cuales pudo identificar y comprender los factores de origen y las consecuencias de su violencia.

El teniente Gardea con más de 15 años de servicio con CDCR, destacó que



ha presenciado casos de ex convictos que fueron liberados de SQ, han regresado como voluntarios a impartir grupos de auto ayudada, resaltando que son personas muy diferentes; a cuando estuvieron en prisión.

La Asistente de Director R. Rosales expresó que apoya cualquier proyecto de ley, como empleada de CDCR, las propuestas presentadas serán

revisadas por sus supervisores en Sacramento.

El evento cultural sirvió para resaltar la travesía que muchos inmigrantes encarcelados de origen Salvadoreños pasan después de cumplir sus sentencia y siendo personas rehabilitadas, muchos son repatriados y encarcelado nuevamente sin cometer un crimen.

“En SQ., tenemos la oportunidad de hablar con los encarcelados y tratar de obtener ideas para tratar de reparar y preparar a esas personas hacia su futuro”, concluyó Jenkins, agregando “Tenemos que entender cómo se mira la rehabilitación e invertir en formas para que la personas tengan una segunda oportunidad”.

El uso de prácticas ilegales en arrestos

Por César Martínez
Staff Writer

El Departamento de Justicia de los Estados Unidos lleva investigaciones en varios estados de la nación, hallando un patrón de prácticas policíacas inconstitucionales, resaltando el uso de fuerza desmedida y la discriminación; además de prácticas administrativas que afectan principalmente a personas de color. De acuerdo a un artículo escrito por Travis Loller.

Loller detalla que el Dep. de Justicia ha encontrado innumerables prácticas administrativas que van desde llenar reportes falsos, registros a casas sin órdenes judiciales, amenazar a personas desarmadas a punta de pistola, aterrorizar a

personas de color, arresto a personas que no pueden pagar fianzas, manejo irregular en casos de ofensas sexuales y en algunos casos extremos, la muerte como resultado de arrestos policíacos.

Tal es el caso de George Floyd, quien murió en mayo del 2020 en Minneapolis a manos del oficial Derek Chauvin; después de someterlo contra el pavimento por nueve minutos y medio sin importarle que él pudiera respirar, diciendo “no puedo respirar”. Actualmente el oficial cumple condena por asesinato.

Mauro Rolando Cervantes López reo de San Quentin comentó, que el departamento policíaco de Modesto California, realizo un operativo para detenerlo, en ese momento él no comprendía

el idioma, así que suplico a los oficiales no disparar ya que viajaba acompañado de su familia.

“El temor a que los oficiales empezaran a disparar sin ningún motivo me paralizó, de gran manera que lo único que pude hacer fue gritar a través de la ventana — por favor no disparen, tengo a mi bebe dentro del carro... por favor bajen sus armas, yo me voy a entregar —”, dijo Cervantes López al relatar su experiencia tras su arresto.

De acuerdo al Código Penal en su Sec. 835a. (3) indica textualmente; que la decisión de un agente de paz, de usar la fuerza se evaluara cuidadosa y exhaustivamente, de manera que refleje la gravedad de esa autoridad y las graves consecuencias del uso de la fuerza por parte de los agentes

de paz, a fin de garantizar que los agentes usen la fuerza de manera consistente con la ley y las políticas de la agencia.

El Dep. de Justicia tiene en la mira a varios Departamentos Policiacos bajo investigación, Tal es el caso de la muerte de Tyre Nichols, donde encontraron un patrón de fuerza excesiva ilegal y discriminación de parte del Departamento de Memphis, según el artículo.

Loller también se señala los constantes patrones de fuerza y discriminación injustificada del Dep. de Policía de Phoenix, contra personas Hispanas, Nativos Americanos y de tez oscura. Reporta además, que en la ciudad de Lexington, Mississippi; un grupo de derechos civiles interpuso una demanda al departamento de dicha ciudad, donde

los oficiales actuaban bajo conflictos de interés, ya que los policías arrestaban a personas sin posibilidad de pagar multas excesivas y sin ningún acceso a una pronta audiencia.

Arturo Meléndez otro residente de SQ, quien residió en el condado de los Ángeles comentó que él estuvo unido a las pandillas anteriormente y que por ende, le ocasionó arrestos en varias ocasiones por los alguaciles del condado.

Meléndez relatando una de sus varias experiencia dijo: “Me acuerdo que la vez en la que tuve mucho miedo, fue en una ocasión donde me subieron a la patrulla y me dejaron en una de las calles donde vivía una pandilla rival, y antes de irse anunciaron por el altavoz, para que supieran

que hay alguien de otra pandilla”, añadiendo que en varias ocasiones fue puesto bajo amenaza y de maltrato físico por los alguaciles del su condado.

La autoridad debe actuar acorde al Cod. Penal Sec. 835a. (a) (1) establece que; la autoridad para usar la fuerza fisica, conferida a los agentes del orden público por dicho artículo, constituye una responsabilidad seria que deberá ejercerse con prudencia y respeto por los derechos humanos y la dignidad, así como por la inviolabilidad de toda vida humana.

La ley agrega que, toda persona tiene derecho a esta libre de uso excesivo de la fuerza por parte de los agentes que actúen bajo pretexto de la ley.

SQ Warriors' teamwork pays off half-way through season

By Anthony Manuel Carvalho Sports Editor

As the San Quentin Warriors embarked on their season, the team’s quest to perform better than last year, may be within reach. From April 12th to the end of July the SQ Warrior have produced a record of.

No matter the record, the most celebrated incarcerated sports team in America leaves fans and players on all teams with vivid memories.

“I’m overjoyed with the support we get from our sponsors,” said San Quentin Warriors head coach Jeremiah Brown. “We’ve got a full schedule and its gonna be an awesome experience.”

The schedule so far has had their eternal opponents – First Baptist Church’s ‘Kingdom’ team, The Prison Sports

Ministry ‘Green Team’, the Bittermen, Town Boogie and the Outsiders Team – take competitive and spiritual swipes against SQRC’s round-ball juggernaut.

Warriors Head Coach Jeremiah Brown said the team has young guys but will remain highly competitive with their speed and defense. “Stan Tillman will help provide stability and leadership as he returns to the program after a two-year hiatus,” added Brown.

“When comparing the new players with last year’s team it could be just as good, if not better,” said Donell Pimpton Jr., a hold over from last years Warriors team.

The SQ Warriors’ played at the end of May against The Prison Sports Ministry ‘Green Team’ again. The Green Team made their second visit to SQRC during

the Memorial Day weekend. “Its hard to get commitments on a holiday weekend so we have some new blood today,” said PSM’s lead volunteer, Bill Eppling.

The ‘new look’ SQ Warriors took an early lead and never looked back. A 12-point lead after one quarter was stretched to 17 at half-time. During the third quarter they extended their lead to 18 before winning 98-74.

“I’m so proud of the guys. We shortened the roster and rotations and they responded with great sportsmanship,” said Brown. “Shout out to Keyshawn Strickland who was constantly double-teamed.”

“For me, it’s normal. Pass to open teammates and trust they make their shots and they did,” said Strickland.

Adding to the team’s memory chest, both teams and coaches took a lap around the

Lower Yard to bond with other residents of SQRC.

“Everyone was having more fun than I expected, I didn’t know how many activities there were,” said Naji Sanaha, 29, of his first visit to San Quentin. “Everyone knows and supports each other.”

The SQ Warriors basketball team’s sixth game of the year was played under the bright blue skies of the Lower Yard’s outdoor basketball court on the last Saturday of June.

“We fought hard and persevered,” said Warriors coach Jerry Brown. Brown co-designed 94 Feet, a conflict-resolution group that is sponsored by PSM. “I’m so proud of how they used teamwork to overcome adversity, it made coaching fun today.”

The Green Team got out to an early lead with the first quarter ending at 16-15. The SQ

Warriors grabbed the lead at halftime, 42-36, and they would not trail again. After completing three quarters of play their lead was 66-60 and they pulled away to finish the game with a final score of 96-88.

During the pregame, assistant coach Demond Lewis spoke about the work the team does in here, “Practicing not what we want, but what we can give and who we want to become,” said Lewis. Lewis said he believes their new beliefs can be carried to the outside to build family and community.

“My father, uncle and cousin all did time so I have empathy for the incarcerated,” said first time visitor Isaiah Martin. “I’m one hundred percent here for Jesus, we shouldn’t fix our minds on worldly things, so I don’t judge.”

During the final weekend

of July, Bill Eppling’s PSM Green Team had a significant height advantage, led by 6’ 10” Henry Welsh, and the 6’3” Sam Beskind.

The Green Team led by 3 at the end of the 1st quarter, the game was tied at the half and PSM led by 2 at the end of the 3rd. The Warriors, smaller in stature, tried to utilize their speed, as the game remained hotly contested. However during the final five minutes of the 4th quarter, the Green Team pulled away to finish with a final score of 84-75.

“The difference in the game was composure,” said Warriors coach Jerry Brown, “late in the game we lost ours.”

“Everyone is kind but competitive,” said first time visitor Beskind, “it’s a privilege to be on the court with them.

—*Martin Keith DeWitt Contributed to this story*

SQ Giants plate three runs late in barnburner

By Terrell Marshall Journalism Guild Writer

The San Quentin baseball team welcomed the SF Dealers onto the Field of Dreams for what turned out to be a seven inning barnburner, leading to a 16-13 SQ Giants victory.

Having recently lost to the Mission 5-3 and the Barons 13-0 in their last two outings, the SQ Giants showed up to the Lower Yard on May 24 with a hunger to win.

“I love tough games like this,” said SQ Giant fielder Kameron “Kam” Hamilton. “When the pressure is on, it keeps everybody locked in.”

The determination was palpable as resident players

Aaron “June” Miles, Eli Guerra, Ricky Dias, and Patrick Poteat all hit RBI’s to rally for seven runs in the first inning, signaling a possible blowout.

Undeterred by the attack, the Dealers showed their mettle in the second inning when Jack McKeon stole home, impressing the fans and firing up his team.

“I watched the pitchers rhythm, waited for him to get set, and as soon as he looked away I went for it,” McKeon said.

After both teams changed pitchers, the score stayed the same in the third inning before McKeon shined again by hitting an RBI double in the top of the fourth that closed the gap to 7-4.

The SQ Giants returned

friendly fire in the bottom of the fourth inning. Carrington Russelle hit a double, Jarrod “Deuce” Williams walked and stole second base, and Anthony “T-Tone” Denard hit an RBI single to advance the score to 9-4.

Dealers third baseman Dan “McGoo” McGeehan started the fifth inning with an RBI, earning another two runs. Then, in this epic battle of wills between the two rival teams, left-hander Will Konevich crushed a homerun deep over the right field fence, bringing the score to a dangerously close 9-8.

McGeehan appreciated the opportunity to play on the Field of Dreams, sharing that

it meant a lot to the Dealers to receive such a warm welcome coming down the hill. “We came here today focused and ready to leave it all out on the field,” McGeehan said. “To hear the sounds of the game echo off these walls is something special.”

Next up for the Dealers was McKeon again, who hit a line drive so hard and loud off the center field scoreboard that it silenced the entire yard. SQ Giants centerfielder Hamilton quickly fielded the ball and threw a dagger to third, nailing the runner in his path and ending the inning at 9-8.

“I didn’t think he was going to go for it, but he was hungry,” said Hamilton. “When I saw

him rounding second I just threw it as hard as I could, and got him.”

Before ending the fifth inning, the SQ Giants added three more runs to extend their lead to 12-8. Both teams traded runs in the sixth inning to raise the score to 13-9.

In the top of the seventh, Dealers’ centerfielder Jac Derner hit a homerun over the right field fence, bumping the score 13-10.

The SQ Giants allowed two more on base before the Dealers’ Jack McKeon launched the longest ball of the day over the centerfield fence, tying the game to a heart-stopping 13-13.

In the bottom of the seventh

inning, SQ Giant Alonzo Delgado hit a pop-fly that dropped into the left field gap before Russelle hit one deep into center for a double. Then J. Williams walked, loading the bases. Next up was Miles, who hit a sacrifice fly to take the lead before Victor Picazo, the last batter of the day, hit in two runners, ending the game 16-13.

Having played baseball on the Field of Dreams seven times before, SF Dealers Ricky Rein said that every time he comes to the “Q,” it feels like the first. “I can feel the camaraderie, the spirit, and the challenges of the game,” Rein said. “These guys are so good, we really have to play up to their level when we come here.”

Women's basketball comes to the Bay

By Terrell J. Marshall Journalism Guild Writer

The Golden State Valkyries are the newest addition to the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) and are also the most valuable team in the league’s history.

In their first season, the new 2025 Bay Area Western Conference team’s net worth was over \$500 Million. According to the <https://valkyries.com> website, this amount surpasses the previous most valuable WNBA team, the New York Liberty, by more than 15 million dollars.

Valkyries starting guard Veronica Burton told KPIX Channel 5 that she is excited to be on the newest team in the franchise.

“I knew we were going to do something big this year,” Burton said. “We all want to win, and having this many supporters has truly been something special.”

Since the WNBA started in 1997, the Sacramento Monarchs who folded in 2009 was the last team in Northern California. The league remained steady with 12 teams until 2025 when the Valkyries became the thirteenth team in the league.

According to a report in *The Athletic* Golden State Warriors Joe Lacob and Peter Guber, finalized an agreement to start a WNBA expansion team in San Francisco. On October 5, 2023, they agreed to a franchise expansion fee of \$50 million, to be paid over the next ten years.

On January 30, 2024, the plans for the new team to begin play in 2025 were reported along with the hiring of Jess

Smith as the team’s president. Within a few hours of the news, there were over 2,000 season tickets sold.

On April 16, 2024, the new expansion team website named Ohemaa Nyanin as the General Manager along with Nataline Nakase as the team’s first Head Coach. Before the team’s name was announced, over 6,000 season ticket sales had already been made.

In May 2024, the team was officially named the Golden State Valkyries. The team selected violet, gold, black and white as their team colors that were revealed along with the team’s logo.

Inside the Valkyries “V” shaped logo is a depiction of the Bay Bridge, symbolizing the connection between Oakland where the team’s headquarters is located, and San Francisco where they play their home games. The logo’s design features cables doubling as wings and a tower replicating a sword. The thirteen lines split from the sword, as wings, represent the Valkyries as the thirteenth team in the league. The five triangles inside each wing represent the ten players on the court.

In December 2024, the new Bay Area team participated in the WNBA’s 2025 season draft. As the team was established this year, the Valkyries have sold out every home game inside the San Francisco Chase Center Arena. The team’s adoring fans have affectionately re-named the Bay Area venue as “Ballhalla,” noted the website.

“I like the direction we are going,” Burton said. “For me to be starting it off in this jersey means everything.”

TIER TALK

Resident implements redemptive qualittes of rehabilitation

By Anthony Manuel Carvalho Sports Editor

The jersey that is identified as #11 in sports comes with huge expectations. It publicizes a person’s athletic prowess, and attracts attention that leaders such as quarterbacks or point guards receives in most sports.

“Double Aces,” is what #11 represents and the talented SQ Warrior Navion “Smoove” Starks has carried the weight of that recognition since he put on aces for the SQ Warriors four years ago.

Starks immediately became a leader in the sports world at SQRC and believes his position is to give back to the younger generation. “I lead by example to show that there is a better way than the negative way, which for most has been the norm for the most part of our younger men’s lives,” said Starks.

Starks wears aces with the pride of a champion as he moves basketball fans that pour into the gym to watch the SQ Warriors play. Ironically, his dogged determination on the court hides his humble compassionate demeanor that residents see as he helps youngsters get back on course.

Starks, now 39 years old, has an athletic background that made him one of the most highly recruited high school football players in the state before showing talent as a chef.

Starks said he strives to make living amends to his victim as he makes sports part of his rehabilitation as he stars for the SQ Warriors.

Starks has participated in prison sports since 2007 and believes there are no other prison sports programs



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Navion "Smoove" Starks shoot jump shot over defender

like SQRC in the nation. “I wanted to participate in SQ Basketball because the program represents and stands for family, knowing one’s self, and building better men,” said Starks.

Starks bought into the California Model by seeing added value that insures all residents are prepared once they leave the walls of CDCR. “All of California needs to buy-in more to the redemptive qualities of rehabilitation.”

“I believe that if everyone implements the program heart and soul, then it would make a lot of staff and administration upset, because crime would decrease on the streets and eventually the prison population would go down and stay down,” said Starks.

Starks noted the basketball program’s 94 Feet program as a concept that is being developed to take to the streets to help the juveniles before they commit crime.

Teammates and fans describe Starks as a humble leader who takes a back seat while never seeking the limelight. He is known to have developed a great sense of humor as he healed from his own struggles, acquiring insight that enables him to realize the importance of being a leader on the most recognized prison sports reform team in the nation. “I’m like the silent partner in a company, who loves to see others shine. My struggles continue to teach me things like using conscious thinking and positive self-talk

as coping skills. No matter what people do to me and what happens to me, I still lead by example,” said Starks.

“[Competition] feels good, only when there is a difference made in someone’s life; that’s when it feels great and that’s why I’m careful with practical jokes performed on resident teammates because they can go bad quickly,” said Starks.

Although his humble and compassionate demeanor may seem sullen at times, he does relish the funny memories from SQ sports that will last a lifetime.

“I’d have to say the animation of one referee who performs this little jump dance whenever he makes a call on the court makes me laugh every time,” said the glowing Starks. “Referee Ismail ‘Ish’ Freelon; No matter how wrong the call is, no matter how much he gets crazy with a player or coach, his passion still brings a laughing spirit to the game; he’s like a mascot.”

As a now amateur chef who loves to bake, Starks hopes to put the heat on CDCR and the Board of Parole Hearings to acknowledge sports, for the redemptive qualities that competition instills in all who participates. “In some people’s lives, sports plays a major role in healing and it works to the point of success,” said Starks.

As for the antagonists who look at sports as non-contributive to rehabilitation Starks challenges them to come discover what prison sports is all about. “I only have one thing to say; don’t knock it until you try it. Come and see hands on and really see what the program is really about; don’t just criticize from the outside looking in.”



Anand Alexander with guests and his artwork



Inside and outside Humans of San Quentin team members



Jose Alfredo Lopez reads his story

Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Shared experiences break down false beliefs and build healthier connections

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Are you incarcerated and want to share your prison experience with the world? Well, Humans of San Quentin is a nonprofit that does just that.

HoSQ publishes stories about lived experiences, artwork that highlights individualized creativity, poetry about life and relationships, food experienced before prison, and recipes for cooking in prison.

Resident Curtys Taylor said that for him the most impactful part of being on HoSQ’s community engagement team is the responses he receives from readers in society, who see those incarcerated as humans, and not their crime.

“Telling our stories aren’t always easy because we have victims to think about,” said Taylor. “Humans of San Quentin have given us the opportunity to tell our stories for all those who are willing to listen.”

Sharing your experience helps to change the narrative and the stigma placed on people in prison. Whether it is a personal memory, poem, art, or food related story, it is important to include the voice of people excluded from those

public conversations about humanity.

Resident Treavion Early said that his focus is to do things that impact positive change in his community.

“Being a part of Humans of San Quentin was a meaningful experience. I was able to be more comfortable when sharing my story. I am no longer harming my community. Now I’m giving back to my community,” said Early.

The program is open to anyone who wants to share his or her lived experience. You do not need to write long stories that explain a bunch of details. You do not need to write well because HoSQ has dedicated interns who love to read and edit your stories.

“I have always been interested in the criminal justice system,” said Eva, an intern with HoSQ. “It is so cool to be here with the humans whose stories I have read and pictures I have seen.”

HoSQ publishes stories on their website, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts to show incarcerated persons’ humanity, but there are three exceptions: no nudity, violence, or gang art.

Resident Darius Poole said that being at San Quentin allows him to give back to his community. He said he was

excited to learn that people in society still hear his voice even though he is in prison.

“I feel like being posted online helps me feel like a human,” said Poole.

By sharing your experience, you can help educate people in society and bring awareness to the humans locked inside prisons, some for decades at a time.

Each human in prison has a lived experience, and by reflecting on that experience you can change the path of someone traveling that same journey. Sharing your experience can provide other men and women with insight about living in prison, and for you, the writer, it could be a tool for processing painful experiences.

Stephen Embrey lost his daughter three weeks after dancing with her at a father/daughter dance, the first one held at San Quentin where resident fathers attended a prom with their daughter. He said that was hard for him to talk about his loss and his situation, but HoSQ gave him a chance to express what he needed to say.

“Humans of San Quentin allowed me to speak up about my loss and I just had to write about it because I wasn’t able to talk about it,” said Embrey. “I appreciate them putting my

voice and my story out there to show how much I love and care about my daughter.”

The community that HoSQ provides to people in detention facilities in and outside of the U.S. cultivates connections with other incarcerated people and outside communities. These connections help to develop compassion and empathy for people experiencing similar situations.

Jose Lopez said he joined HoSQ after seeing a flyer hanging around the prison. Lopez said that he made bad choices as a young man, but that today, after joining HoSQ, he has become a different person.

“When I saw the flyer to write about face tattoos, I felt like I could relate. When I was younger, I was a lost and selfish kid who joined a gang. I thought tattoos were a badge of honor,” said Lopez. “In prison, there were certain jobs I couldn’t get because I had tattoos on my face.”

The stories shared by the incarcerated men and women change attitudes and break down those false belief systems that tend to separate humans from one another. Through shared experiences, anybody can build healthier emotional connections with the outside community and

inspire others.

Diane Kahn was inspired to start HoSQ after hearing about the storytelling project Humans of New York. HoNY was founded in 2010 by Brian Staton for men and women incarcerated in New York. Staton, who interviewed people around the world, concluded that “writing will be more compelling when it is told through the eyes of a relationship,” according to Kahn.

In 2018, Kahn met with James King, who was an incarcerated writer at SQ, to discuss her passion for sharing incarcerated voices with the world. She was encouraged by King to meet with Juan Haines, who at the time was the senior editor for *SQNews*, because Haines too had a passion for projecting those unheard voices from behind prison walls to the outside world.

Residents involved in HoSQ said the program is different from other writing programs at SQ because it allows them to share their authentic selves.

HoSQ showed their appreciation for its members doing time at San Quentin by hosting an appreciation celebration. More than 60 contributors attended the festivities, which included performances from both the

resident Aztec group and the resident Native Hawaiian religious group; both groups’ performers shared the history of their culture through dance numbers. Also performing was resident Matthew Sheppard, who shut down hecklers wanting to include President Donald Trump into his comedic routine. He stuck to skits about prison food and humility after connecting his parents’ substance abuse to subtle addictions to comfort foods like potato chips and peanuts.

Alongside residents, the 30 volunteers who help edit and post the incarcerated voices to the social media platforms mingled with residents who enjoyed pizza and cake during the event.

Kahn said that over the course of four months she has been organizing the HoSQ content to show up on *Edovo*, an education application on the tablets that were distributed to incarcerated people in prisons. HoSQ is in 190 facilities in and outside of the U.S. and Kahn said that the credit goes to the incarcerated people willing to share their vulnerability and their authentic selves with the world.

“We wouldn’t be there if it wasn’t for the stories you guys share,” said Kahn.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Investigations into excessive force by law enforcement

By César Martínez
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Justice has conducted many investigations of scandals and patterns of excessive force and discrimination — and even death — by law enforcement in various cities across the nation, according to a report from Travis Loller on December 5, 2024.

The DOJ found countless illicit practices, such as falsifying documents, search warrants without sufficient cause, unwarranted arrests of homeless persons, and discrimination against people of color and people with mental health issues. They also arrested vulnerable persons who could not pay fines.

“When I was arrested, the police used excessive force and one of them broke my wrist when he putting the handcuffs, I needed because until today, my wrist still hurts,” said Mauro Rolando Cervantes Lopez, a resident at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

California Penal Code

§ 835 a (3) stated that the decision by a peace officer to use force shall be evaluated carefully and thoroughly, in a manner that reflects the gravity of that authority and the serious consequences of the use of force by peace officers, in order to ensure that officers use force consistent with the law.

In May 2020, in Minneapolis, an event that caught nationwide attention occurred when officer Derek Chauvin caused the death of George Floyd when he pressed his neck on the asphalt for-nine-and-a-half minutes. The DOJ started an investigation after the death of Floyd and discrimination in the Minneapolis Police Department.

In an additional report, CalMatters stressed that in 2016, the California Department of Justice started to collect data on excessive use of force across the state from various police departments. After a three-year investigation, it concluded that most people in California died from gunshots than from crimes.

According to the data, in 2017, nearly 160 Californians died because of a firearm. Even though national statistics said African-Americans represented a major portion of victims killed by police this also applies to Latinos in the Golden State who represent 39% in contrast to other races in the state.

P.C. Sec. § 835a (1) specified that the authority to use physical force, conferred on peace officers by this section, is a serious responsibility that shall be exercised judiciously and with respect for human rights and dignity and for the sanctity of every human life. The legislature further found and declared that every person has a right to be free from excessive use of force by officers acting under colors of law.

Arturo Melendez, a former gang member and resident of San Quentin said, “On one occasion, I was chased on foot after crashing a stolen car and when they caught me, the officer hit my head.” Melendez also stated the officer said, “This would teach you to run on the next time.”

Insight Gardening renamed, expands to Lower Yard

By Will Harris
Journalism Guild Writer

The Insight Garden Program has expanded its planting and growing from H-Unit to San Quentin’s main yard. During this process the program has changed its name to Land Together.

“Land Together, formerly Insight Garden Program, changed our name in 2025 to reflect the vast array of services we offer inside and for reentry,” said San Quentin IGP Program Manager Isa Pena.

Land Together’s new garden is located adjacent to the ARC trailer where the prison canteen has been relocated. All residents of San Quentin are welcome to visit and learn what it means to rehabilitate through gardening.

Resident Angelo “Guido” Ceccato has been a part of Land Together for over three years since being in Avenal State Prison.

“I believe all should have access to the garden. This program opens your eyes to

not just gardening but your change,” Ceccato said.

Andrew Winn, the program director, was formerly incarcerated; he has worked in that position since 2021 and is responsible for the name change.

Land Together has been trying to expand to the Lower Yard for at least a year. Previously they were exclusively in H-Unit. Volunteers for Land Together expressed a lot of joy and gratitude for coming here and working with residents.

“I’ve been working with incarcerated people for four years, and I think that the incarcerated are not treated humanely and justly,” said volunteer Lena. “We need to change the way we treat incarcerated people. Change the way we see justice.”

According to SQ resident Johnny Rodriguez, the garden gives new life to the yard, with the hopes of producing fruit. He has learned how to build a foundation using plants and soil.

“I’m learning how to sow seeds and build a relationship

with people by nurturing a garden,” said Rodriguez. “I want the volunteers to know that they do a lot for us that they don’t see and I want that for other incarcerated people.”

Land Together is looking to deepen their work at San Quentin and to create an atmosphere that caters to wellness for residents and staff.

According to Pena, some of the correctional staff are interested in creating a green workspace to contribute to the overall wellness. “Captain Hemmerling is our biggest supporter,” he said.

Land Together also has programs at other prisons such as the California Medical Facility, CSP-Solano, CSP-Lancaster, Mule Creek State Prison, Avenal State Prison and California Correctional Women’s Facility.

According to volunteer Amanda Berger, the best mission of the program is to provide a space where SQ residents can deal with issues such as depression and anxiety.

YOUTH



By Michael “Luqman” Russell

KidCat Writer

How do you actually know when all your hard work has paid off? For me, self-doubt has always been present in my life. My self-worth was often defined by my failures rather than what I’d actually accomplished in life. In 2017, I made the decision to change. At the time I was a gang member participating in all the activities that came with that lifestyle. When I made the choice to

Overcoming self-doubt and conquering imposter syndrome

change my life, I had a big problem; I did not know how to change! And so I did what every person in need should do, ask for help.

Going to programs such as KidCat First Step has literally been life changing and life saving for me. Over the years learning ways to express and articulate how I am feeling and thinking has impacted me in a way that allows me to build healthy relationships with those around me day-to-day. This is a skill that also allows me to love myself, to appreciate others, and to understand my self-worth. Coming to prison I had low self-esteem issues. I just did not believe in myself and I refused to set goal with the belief that they were not obtainable. If you were to ask me that insightful questions like “Who are you?” I would have told you something that I did not

believe myself. I would have lied to you just as I had lies to myself for many years. I went in front of the Board of Parole Hearings April 29. I remember the Deputy Commissioner asking me “Mr. Russell, Where did this confidence you’re exhibiting come from?” This was the most surprising question that I was asked the entire hearing. Here I am nervous, heart pounding, shaking in my boots, and terrified of what is to come next, and she is asking me where did I get this confidence.”

Years of hard work, and a commitment to just be better makes confidence look easy. Sometimes all it takes is the smallest achievements in order for someone to start believing in oneself. In this instance that was enough for me. I remember never wanting to go to class but then I would get there

and be glad I showed up. I hated telling others about my life and I was always feeling judged. I had this sense of uniqueness as if no one else had been through what I had been through. Later I found it healing to just open up and let out my worries to those who are dealing with similar battles as myself. Currently I am in my final weeks of KidCat First Step, a program that has helped guide me to a better understanding of who I am.

How do I overcome imposter syndrome? By reminding myself daily of the hard work I have put in to become sincere in my walk. I do not shy away from compliments, and I do not over value others opinion of who they believe me to be. I can name all the self-help programs I have participated in over the years, as well as the college classes I completed. But what does

any of it mean if I had continued to live my life inside a prison cell. I remember being overcome with emotion after hearing the words of the commissioner. Truly I have never been praised as much in my entire life. The only thing I could think about at that moment was getting out of that room and calling my 85 year-old grandmothers to inform her of the news. The one person who believed in me from the day I came into this earth.

The cure to imposter syndrome is confidence. By believing in myself I now possess the confidence I once lacked. For those of you who are dealing with similar feelings, I would say value yourself first. Do not be afraid to ask for help when you are in need and continue to strive to be a better “you” for you. You are worthy of redemption; you just have to believe in yourself.

FORUM

Symposium highlights impact of low literacy on incarcerated

By Michael Callahan

Layout Designer

Low literacy impacts approximately 70% of incarcerated adults in the U.S, according Wikipedia. In California, a large portion of individuals in the custody of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation scored below a sixth grade reading level on their adult basic education test.

San Quentin Peer Literacy Mentors is a program that provides peer-to-peer literacy and comprehension assistance for persons seeking a basic or higher education. Recently, the mentors hosted Bay Area librarians and educators to discuss services provided for those who struggle with low literacy in prison; they also came up with ideas about how to improve education and library services inside and outside of prison.

“This program helped me to learn in reading and mathematics. It is magnificent that people help others my age to read and write,” resident Trino Suarez said. “I like to communicate now [that] I feel more comfortable; before I could not talk to you.”

Discussions centered on how low literacy affects access to rehabilitation programs, understanding medical information, identifying and addressing educational trauma, teaching strategies, and how library

services assist in furthering literacy.

Mentors Angel Alvarez and Cesar Nava acted out a scenario of a nurse and a non-English-speaking resident. The situation was based on the real experience of an individual who was informed he would need a MRI and a stint for heart surgery and new diabetes medication. The low literacy individual nodded his head and repeated certain words to imply he understood. Unfortunately, this is all too common. Whether it is the stigma, intimidation, or embarrassment, the lack of understanding causes medical trauma.

“To support somebody in need we cannot stigmatize them but treat them in a holistic way so you can humanize them,” Nava said.

CDCR’s Dr. Tootell, supervisor of the Peer Support Specialist Program, said some persons are scared to ask for help and other barriers might hold them back from seeking treatment. “Connection is not there so people get lost in the shuffle. Interpersonal connection is key.”

Tootell said the challenges individuals face in prison are not different from those outside and people have to learn how to advocate for themselves. She said that PSSP pairs low-literacy individuals with peer mentors to make up for their needs.

In each classroom, attendees were handed a piece of paper written in a

foreign language and asked to fill it out. Several were confused; some said they felt helpless and useless. Others said they were anxious and wanted to walk out.

The mentors highlighted how developing a relationship, modeling or relating on a personal level, and shared vulnerability establish credibility, so they can assist those who have literacy or language barriers.

In the class dealing with identifying and addressing educational trauma and impacts of low- literacy classroom, several mentors shared their experiences with educational trauma. They mentioned dyslexia, being a foreign student, and negative home environment. All those issues contributed to distrust in adults.

“In first grade I got excited to learn and then a teacher chastised me in front of class. The next year a teacher yelled at me again and announced my grades out loud,” Cody Rhodes said. “It was not until a teacher showed she believed in me did I have confidence to continue school.”

When attendees were asked about their experience with trauma and literacy, some said it was cause and effect, a snowball effect. Low confidence, low self-esteem, and inequity were some of the many factors mentioned that contribute to feelings of shame.

Mentor Jimmy Daly said he was a hyperactive kid in a Catholic school. “I shied

away from school and fell further and further behind. I did not even know how a sentence or paragraph was structured,” he said.

According to Wikipedia, California ranks high in having prison education policies for providing adult basic education, GED, vocational, and college programs. The risk of recidivating is lower among those who improve their literacy while incarcerated, and improved literacy can improve poverty and unemployment levels. Nationally, the incarcerated who complete education programs are more than 40% less likely to reoffend.

Other ideas on how to improve education included patience, different educational techniques (visual, verbal, kinesthetic), providing a vulnerable and safe space that encourages perseverance, asking for permission from students, using motivational interviewing, humility, teamwork, and respecting boundaries.

“Residents’ stories have been powerful, honest, and vulnerable. I have a greater understanding about the barriers that residents face,” guest librarian Raemona Little-Taylor said. “There is power in the peer support networks that breaks barriers and increases access to assistance. Building a relationship with trust is really transformative.”ir adult basic education test.

REFORM

Organization fights sentencing enhancements

By Jerry Maleek Gearin

Journalism Guild Chair

People over Politics a step toward criminal justice reform as formerly incarcerated CEO endorses woman candidate for California Governor.

Caesar McDowell a native of Rialto CA, is the Co-Founder of Unite The People Incorporated in Long Beach CA, who has fought mass-incarceration, and advocated for marginalized communities, according to *FOX 40 (Sacramento)*.

McDowell spent two decades at San Quentin State Prison, one of California’s infamous correctional facilities.

He stands by reformist Sharifah Hardie in the upcoming 2026 California Governor’s race. Her campaign is based on financial renewal, tax incentives and free enterprise, stated in the article.

“I know true leadership when I see it, said McDowell. “She is committed to building an economy that works for all of us, creating real opportunities for women, minority entrepreneurs, and underserved communities.”

Hardie is guided by her campaign slogan” People Over Politics.” She wants to move in the direction in uplifting struggling families, giving second chances to forgotten people.

McDowell and Hardie’s mission of justice and equality is synonymous: leadership that believes in criminal justice reform and economic vision, noted *Fox 40*.

“Sharifah is not a politician who simply talks about change; she is a woman of action who believes in People Over Politics,” McDowell said. “Like myself, she understands the struggles faced by everyday Californians, struggles that too often go unheard by those in power.”

McDowell who has worked with Calif. State Senator Nancy Skinner, Actress Tiffany Haddish, and other Californians who want to advocate for underserved people.

Unite the people Inc has been active in the progression of legislation accomplishments which included Governor Gavin Newsom’s Budget Act during the 2020 covid-19 pandemic, that gave 90-day credits to eligible incarcerated people, according to the publication.

The organization’s continued efforts are leading the way to eliminate sentencing enhancements in the state of California, with a future goal of expanding to Philadelphia Pennsylvania.

“I urge all Californians who believe in second chances, social justice, and a future where every voice matters to stand with me in supporting Sharifah Hardie for Governor,” McDowell said.

News Briefs across the nation

By Bostyon Johnson Managing Editor

1. California (The Guardian) –

False reports from US iFalse reports from US immigration officers spark public unrest after The justice department charged at least 26 people with “assaulting” and “impeding” federal officers during protests over immigration raids. However, prosecutors dropped around eight charges because they relied on the inaccurate reports of officers, said court documents. “Our officers are facing a surge in assaults and attacks against them as they put their lives on

2. Kansas (ABC News) –

Leavenworth County Judge John Bryant issued a temporary order that barred CoreCivic’s opening of Midwest Regional Reception Center, costing CoreCivic \$4.2 million a month. The facility would house immigrants facing deportation. Attorney Taylor Concannon Hausmann, who represents CoreCivic, said, “It became clear to CoreCivic that there was not a cooperative relationship.” The lawsuit filed by the

3. Michigan (Michigan Public-NPR) –

The Michigan Department of Corrections reported that two out of ten people released back into the community between 2017 and 2021 returned to prison within the first three years. The

4. Ohio (The Highland County Press) –

The Ohio Senate approved a veterans’ bill headed to the House of Representatives. Senate Bill 179 allows veteran

5. Washington D.C. (Associated Press) –

President Donald Trump received backing from the

services organizations to locate incarcerated veterans using their military record to connect them to outreach programs. “By giving imprisoned veterans a fair second chance, it is my belief that many will flourish and become truly productive members of society,” said Senator Terry Johnson (R-McDermott), the 14th District representative who sponsored the bill.

Supreme Court to create a policy that bans people visiting the U.S. from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. He also placed restrictions on visitors from Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leon, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela. International aid groups and resettlement organizations disagreed with the ban, saying, “This policy is not about national security — it is about sowing division and vilifying communities that are seeking safety and opportunity in the United States,” said President of Oxford America Abby Maxman.

