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Lawyer's unrealistic promises end in disbarment

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Staff Writer

As the California Supreme Court officially ordered the disbarment of Attorney Aaron Spolin, feelings of anxiety and anger revisited San Quentin Rehabilitation Center. Many residents expected the court's September 11 action; in a rare display of catharsis, a few even cheered.



Aaron Spolin

far beyond eight. Spolin had raised the hopes for rapid release from incarceration for his clients, often against all odds. He charged exorbitant fees for services he outsourced to subcontractors whom he paid as little as \$10/hour. Many of them had no license to practice law in the state.

"By preying on incarcerated individuals and their families and charging them unconscionable fees for

See CROOKED on pg 4

San Quentin News wins prison newspaper of the year

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Staff Writer

The *Nash News*, the *CCWF Paper Trail*, and *The Echo* (with its sister publication *1664*) emerged triumphant in the American Penal Press Contest, whose award ceremony took place September 19 at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center's Chapel B.

Of 36 awards in 14 categories, *The Nash News* won six. The *CCWF Paper Trail* and *The Echo/1664* each won five. The *Mule Creek Post* won four. The *North Carolina Prison News Today* and *The Angolite* each won three, rounding out the top six winners. The *Mabel Basset Balance*, the *Cajun Press*, the *Prison Mirror*, and *San Quentin News* all won two awards of 12 recipients, but San Quentin's newspaper won the highly coveted first place in the Best Newspaper category. It also won a second prize in the Best Local Coverage category.

"Progress comes from the mind," philosophized Ron Broomfield, retired San Quentin warden, about prison journalism. Broomfield, an established supporter of prison journalism, later worked as Director of Adult Institutions of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation until his retirement.

San Quentin News Editor-in-Chief Kevin D. Sawyer and Pollen Initiative Editorial Director Kate McQueen hosted the event, which was live-streamed via Microsoft Teams to several of the other facilities around the nation that had publications in the competition. In this unprecedented feat, winners appeared on the chapel's projected screen just long enough to show their appreciation.

Two journalists won multiple awards. Cris Gardner won third place for Best Local Coverage for the *Nash News* and first place for Best Long Form Story for *North Carolina Prison News Today*. CCWF's Nora Igova won second place for Best Feature. She also walked away with the Woman Journalist of the Year award. The screen showed a beaming Igova as she rose from the second row at CCWF and waved at San Quentin.

See SQNEWS on pg 4

MASS INCARCERATION

U.S. incarcerates 600-700 people per 100,000



— STORY ON PAGE 5

BACHELORS PROGRAM

Resident shares his educational journey while in prison

— STORY ON PAGE 8



MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Tablets and screen time detrimental to physical and mental health

— STORY ON PAGE 10-11

Former Death Row residents thrive at CHCF

No more shackles, cuffs, or escorts bring feelings of anxiety and gratitude

By Kevin D. Sawyer
Editor-in-Chief

San Quentin's infamous Death Row has been empty for more than a year. The institution's East Block used to house more than 700 men who have been condemned to die by lethal gas or lethal injection. Where are they now?

About 80 prisoners from "The Row" — a name many of them call East Block — reside at California Health Care Facility in Stockton, Calif. At times, police, prosecutors, politicians, and prison officials refer to them as the "worst of the worst."

However, rehabilitation does occur in unlikely places. Facing state-sanctioned execution for decades, figuratively and literally, some of The Row's best experienced self-reflection and self-improvement. Police reports, court documents, and prisoners' central files do not often reflect who they are after decades of incarceration.

"We're just like everyone else in the [prison] population," said John Davenport, 70. "We're not quite as bad as people who didn't

get on The Row, but we got [some] bad ones."

Davenport, incarcerated since 1980, arrived at CHCF on April 11, 2024, as one of the originals off The Row. "We thought we were going to be shackled when we got off the bus," he said.

Like many CHCF prisoners from The Row, Davenport is part of the institution's permanent work crew. "It's like being on parole," he said. "I like it." He's a kitchen worker and said he works hard. In exchange for his labor, he participates in a music program on weekends, where he plays the bass with other incarcerated musicians.

Jerry Grant Frye, 69, was incarcerated in 1985. While on The Row, he taught himself to play acoustic guitar. Like Davenport, he also spends much of his recreation time in the music program. "I haven't played electric guitar," he said. "I'm just learning."

After nearly 40 years on The Row, Frye projects a pleasant demeanor. He appreciates CHCF and appears anything but dangerous. "It's a whole different

See ROW on pg 4

Resident team fails to overcome seven-time champion Warrior's insurmountable lead

By Martin Keith DeWitt
Journalism Guild Writer

San Quentin Rehabilitation Center's most important and exciting sporting event of the year took place in mid-September when the Golden State Warriors made their annual trip to San Quentin's Lower Yard.

Everything else took a backseat as this year's event became a celebration of the relationships between the San Quentin Warriors and Kings basketball program, Prison Sports Ministries, and the seven-time NBA Championship dynasty.

"It's like a motivation to come here," said Warriors' returning two-way player Jackson Rowe, 28. "The NBA is a grind, [so] we come to help motivate you guys [incarcerated residents], and it reminds us to stay after it."

All in attendance cheered their love for the game, the love that one gets from helping others help themselves, and the love that one has for those who grow and improve.

High-fives and hugs were the first order of business as the Warriors entourage came down the hill and across the yard to the basketball court as resident fans and members of the basketball program welcomed the champions with open arms, literally.

"How can you not be happy about this day?" said Correctional Officer Romero.

At center court, SQ Kings' coach Demond "Oola" Lewis introduced Warden Chance Andes, who spoke about the foundational part sports has played in the empowerment of incarcerated residents. Andes acknowledged that SQ sports' commitment to collaborating with staff has led to some of the changes that have occurred within the CDCR.

Warriors' front office member Kirk Lacob addressed the fans, reminding them of the 12-year history of the Warriors' visits to the institution.

See WARRIORS on pgs 6-7



Above: Jump ball to kick off the 11th annual Golden State and SQ Warriors game



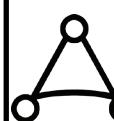
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SanQuentinNews.com

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PROFILE

From walking the Row to walking the dog



Tan Vo and Saul

By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

A former Death Row resident now walks his road of redemption among the general population of San Quentin Rehabilitation Center with a canine companion by his side.

Sentenced to death for murder, four attempted murders and kidnapping in 1995, the State of California placed Loi Tan Vo, 52, in SQ's condemned housing unit where he remained for 29 years.

In 2023, Santa Clara County Deputy District Attorney David Angel reviewed the case, and after speaking with the victims and the victim's family, he determined that Vo met all the criteria for resentencing.

"It was a struggle for us to understand all the factors in the case but once we did, it was an easy decision to make," Angel said.

After resentencing Vo to 25-to-life, the state sent him to North Kern Reception Center, reclassified him as a lower security risk, and then sent him back to SQRC to live among the prison's general population.

"I can't pay my debt to society from inside a cell 23 hours a day," Vo said. "Now I can spend my time healing the pain I've caused to so many."

In January 2024, after decades of being escorted throughout the prison in handcuffs and leg irons, Vo took his first unshackled steps out into his new community.

The shadow of a person's past can sometimes be a burden that stalks them like a plague. Fortunately, for one man, he has managed to escape his past.

Kojo Damani Cluchette is quiet, but when he speaks it's with the confidence of a man who is sure of himself. He's dedicated to his passions, an avid learner who has gained the respect of many of his peers at San Quentin.

"Kojo is a great dude. He's always respectful and positive whenever I see him," said James Bryant, a San Quentin resident who has known K. Cluchette for two years.

For some of the older residents, K. Cluchette reminds them of a man they knew years ago: his dad, John.

The legend of John Cluchette looms large in California's prison system. To many, both in and out of prison, John is viewed as a brother, friend, and activist who advocated for the rights of his peers. It was John's 1971 federal case, *J. Cluchette v. Procunier*, that helped bring reform to CDCR's 115 disciplinary process, for the first time affording inmates due process rights, including calling witnesses and producing defense evidence.

To some prison officials, J. Cluchette was a ranking member of the Black Guerilla Family prison gang. He, along with George Jackson and Fleeta Drumgo, faced accusations of murdering officer John V. Mills at Soledad prison in 1970. The three men would come to be known as the Soledad Brothers.

J. Cluchette would later be acquitted of the charges, and FBI files documented that he was not a member of the Black Guerilla Family.

K. Cluchette says his dad went to prison when he was four years old, but for years, he maintained a good relationship



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Tan Vo and Maybe

Learning to navigate his new surroundings, Vo was brought to tears by one encounter with a puppy named Granger. That encounter changed the trajectory of his life.

"It shook me," Vo said. "It was the first time I got to pet a dog in more than 30 years."

The impact of that experience with his new four-legged friend motivated him, and in the summer of 2025, he became a member of the Canine Companions program.

According to SQ resident dog handler Jared Hansen, the healing a dog can offer is unparalleled. He said the effort Vo puts into training service dogs is proof of his willingness to give back to the community.

"Hopefully this will give his victim's family some solace in knowing his steadfast dedication to making amends," Hansen said.

Vo said humans and dogs are both social creatures, and it's only natural that they share the desire of wanting to be of service and care for each other.

Incarcerated since age 18, Vo lived his adult life in the shadow of society's condemnation, with only glimpses of hope for his future.

Now his future is much brighter and his life has purpose. Vo said that the hope he sees every day amongst his new proactive community is contagious.

Along with spending time training man's best friend, he attends college classes, self-help groups, and is a

member of the Veterans Healing Veterans Program.

"We are all on this rehabilitation journey together," Vo said. "You can really feel the vibe of everyone trying to do better and be the best version of themselves."

When working in the facility's "Healing Garden," Vo says he feels empathy and compassion for his victims. He understands that the healing process is a lifetime commitment to making living amends through community service.

Vo now wakes each morning to the sound of keys unlocking his cell, a reminder of how his life has changed since he left Death Row. The difference now is his opportunity to step outside the cell to pursue his rehabilitation alongside a tail-wagging companion that is eager for another day of training for the future, together.

Events in prison, like alarms, drug overdoses, and violence, also happen outside the walls, Vo said, and ultimately, experiencing these things in prison prepares him for life as a civilian.

Given 34 years credit at his resentencing for time served, Vo is now eligible for release, pending the result of a parole board hearing.

Over the years, Vo's lived experience taught him to keep his side of the street clean. "The key to me going home is to stay in my own lane and honor my victims by continuing to be a positive role model in my community."

Father's past does not deter resident's journey

By Jason Jackson
Journalism Guild Writer

The shadow of a person's past can sometimes be a burden that stalks them like a plague. Fortunately, for one man, he has managed to escape his past.

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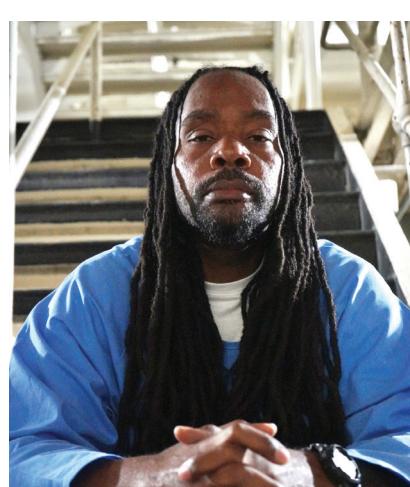


Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Kojo Cluchette

with him through visits and phone calls.

"Growing up, I loved and respected him so much because of the advice he gave, and the fact that he never condoned any of my negative actions," K. Cluchette said.

J. Cluchette's influence over his son would prove insufficient to keep him on the right track, with K. Cluchette getting into increasing amounts of trouble as he got older.

K. Cluchette acknowledges that the stories he heard of his dad and his alleged exploits played a role in the criminal lifestyle that would ultimately land him in prison with a life sentence.

"I realize that for years I attempted to live up to my dad's reputation because everyone around me idolized him, even law enforcement," K. Cluchette said. Even in prison, the expectation to follow his dad shadowed him.

K. Cluchette says that upon his arrival at San Quentin, an officer casually told him he had "big shoes to fill." He emphatically

replied, "I have my own shoes."

In his 18 years of incarceration, K. Cluchette has managed to forge his own path after realizing he needed to change his life for the better, while working to overcome the weight of his dad's legend.

While serving time on the Progressive Programming yard at Lancaster State Prison, K. Cluchette took advantage of the opportunities there. That experience became the catalyst for a long and arduous journey to improvement and genuine rehabilitation.

"I was able to become heavily involved in the church. I started college and began working to better myself and looking forward to one day being released from prison," he said.

K. Cluchette's rehabilitative journey has accelerated since his arrival at San Quentin. He says his role as a peer support worker and involvement in numerous programs like Transformative Mediation, Arms Down, and Back to the Start, have helped him better understand and connect with himself and his peers.

Today, K. Cluchette says that he's become a lot better at expressing himself in more positive ways than he did before his incarceration. He is also free of addictions that contributed to his criminal lifestyle. He now has healthy and loving relationships with his family, including his dad, who paroled from prison in 2018, and whom he credits for helping him become his own man.

"One day, my dad asked me if I wanted this for my kids. I, of course, said 'no.'" Kojo's dad responded, "Neither did I." "That changed me," K. Cluchette recalled.

Upon release, K. Cluchette plans to reconnect with his family and work in the St. Louis-based real estate business he and his wife developed. He also plans to utilize his new skills to support his work with the mentally ill, work he did for 12 years before his incarceration.

San Quentin News

EST. 1940

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Your Voice Matters!

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.

By submitting your content, you consent to these *SQNews* policies:

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EDITORIAL

SQNews moves into digital era with purpose and a new vision

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

A rich rumor pipeline that ebbs and flows fuels talk in California's prisons. At times, it makes sense to get out in front of the rumors to clarify or confirm. In fact, that is exactly why *San Quentin News* was established.

"The grapevine throbbed with weird gossip," wrote Warden Clinton T. Duffy (San Quentin, 1940-1951) in his book *The San Quentin Story*. "I decided that the obvious answer, if we could swing it, would be a regular prison paper." He continued: "The first edition of *San Quentin News*, hand-set and printed on gaudy green paper, was published Dec. 10, 1940."

An untold number of publications appeared on "gaudy green paper," or on other materials of inferior quality, before reaching the halfway point in the twentieth century. That was before the advent of the Internet, email, cell phones, and social media.

It's no secret the California Department of Technology and CDCR entered into a contractual agreement with Global Tel*Link/Viapath to provide tablets to prisoners statewide.

By the time tablets arrived at San Quentin, Securus Technologies, LLC had already filed a petition for writ of mandate to set aside the contract. The courts have ruled in favor of Securus, but that's another story.

Before I returned to the newspaper this year, I asked some of the senior staff why they were still printing 35,000 copies of the newspaper. It was a rhetorical question, but I knew the answer. Metaphorically, *San Quentin News* was stuck in the gears of a twentieth-century publication, one-quarter of the way into a new millennium. Read, bad business model.

Many American publications that have held onto old industry practices are singing their swan song. More to the point, we need to scale down printing and adopt new approaches to disseminating news if we are going to survive.

As tablet users in California prisons know, they have access to telephone calls, games, books, movies, music, news, Lexis Nexis, and apps. The Edovo app is where *San Quentin News* appears, but its current format makes it difficult to read at times, not to speak of the time it takes to load. Believe me, we know. But to make needed changes is not a straightforward process.

For example, Securus will provide new tablets in California prisons. Will those be similar to the GTL devices? We don't know. Will Edovo be available? We hope so. What will the tablet screen look like? We don't have that information. Answers to these questions will allow *San Quentin News* flexibility to reformat page design and layout of the newspaper to fit the new tablets.

Because GTL will cease to provide service in CDCR prisons, the newspaper is, for the moment, at a standstill on features such as font size and column size — one column or two? These are considerations we take into account to place stories on our website, tablets, and in the printed newspaper. We don't yet have all the answers.

The CDCR has not funded the printing

of *San Quentin News* since 2010. Support for the newspaper comes from grant funders, fundraising campaigns, and generous tax-deductible donations from our readers.

Initially, the Prison Media Project facilitated support, thanks to our long-time adviser, Steve McNamara. In 2013, when the University of California Berkeley's Haas School of Business provided us with a 56-page business plan (we call it the "Haas Plan"), then-student Jon Spurlock stayed on as an adviser and established Friends of San Quentin News. After Jesse Vasquez paroled as editor-in-chief of the newspaper, he transformed FoSQN into Pollen Initiative.

Marin Sun Printing has been printing *San Quentin News*, at cost, for 15 years. The majority of newsprint paper comes from Canada. The threat of tariffs could have driven the cost to produce the newspaper (SQN) up by 40%. Had the tariffs gone into effect, we would be saddled with a cost of \$13,000 to print 35,000 newspapers. Then there are the costs to distribute the paper via mail and overnight courier.

To forestall a financial strain, the newspaper scaled down to 12 pages in order to include CCWF to give them space. It's not just cost related.

A decade ago, one of our major grant funders told us they would not fund our operation indefinitely, therefore we had to figure out other methods of distribution. Knowing that, we had to figure other means to sustain the paper.

I am keenly aware of the challenges the Prison Media Project, FoSQN, and Pollen Initiative have faced, and with the assaults on organizations that fund anything that hints of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many grant funders are apprehensive about associating their name with the initials DEI.

After introduction of the Haas Plan, I became the paper's associate editor. For five years, I ran the business side of the operation, where our team worked with volunteers to oversee budgets, donations, grants, distribution, correspondence, updates to the website, video production, newsletters, monthly reports, and more.

The staff never intended to take on business functions. All we wanted to do was write. Out of necessity though, we had to do more than write if we wanted to continue providing the incarcerated population a newspaper. No other media activity within the San Quentin media center has had the obligation or responsibility to do what *San Quentin News* has done. We're stronger as a team because we've had to keep reinventing ourselves. Facing adversity, we pivot, adjust, and keep it moving.

I was on staff when one of my editor-in-chief predecessors, the late Arnulfo T. Garcia, shared his vision to place a copy of *San Quentin News* in the hands of every CDCR prisoner. We learned quickly it was an unrealistic goal. So we adjusted and made the paper accessible to the then 100,000-plus incarcerated in California.

The Haas Plan covered 12 years that commenced in 2013. At the time, the plan met with intense scrutiny because of its old business and paper model. But it was better

than what we had, which was nothing. This year marks the end of that twelfth year.

Jesse Vasquez, executive director of Pollen Initiative, ...made an arrangement with the Edovo Foundation to place all Pollen Initiative supported publications which includes *San Quentin News* on the Edovo app for the benefit of the incarcerated nationwide. Because of that, the newspaper is accessible on tablets provided by the vendor Global Tel*Link. Call it fate, fortune, or luck, but that allowed the newspaper to surpass its goal of providing a newspaper to 100,000-plus incarcerated.

As the Haas Plan winds down, some 2,200 lockup facilities have the potential to access *San Quentin News* electronically as 1,378 facilities actively read the newspaper on the Edovo app. That's more than a half million prisoners, not to mention the availability of the paper on our website and at American Prison Newspapers at JStor.

In 2016, I interviewed McNamara for a story in the July issue of the newspaper. We discussed the future of journalism. McNamara said, "People will always want access to information. The question is how will the information be delivered?" In a 2019 issue of the newsletter *Inside SQNews*, he recalled the "paper's humble beginnings." I had to update a few of his statements to account for the six years that have since passed.

McNamara remembered the newspaper's initial monthly press run of 5,000 copies, distributed to San Quentin residents only. It expanded, until recently, to a distribution of 35,000. By then, all CDCR prisons, some youth facilities, county jails, libraries, incarcerated persons outside California, hundreds of individual donors, and criminal justice representatives received the paper.

San Quentin News staff increased from four to as many as 18; advisers went from four to at least a dozen, and at one time, the total number of volunteers, in and out of the newsroom, numbered more than 50. The newspaper's page count also increased from four to 24, and those pages went from black ink only to full color.

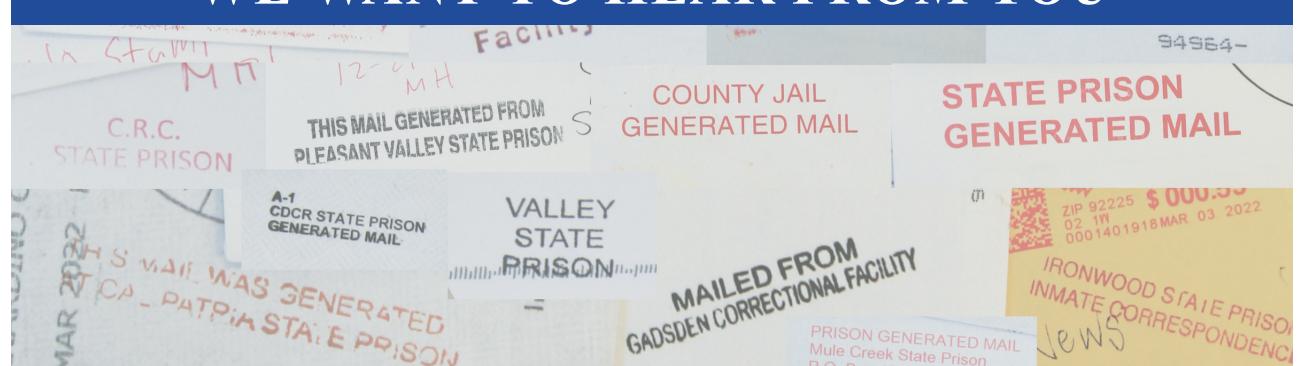
All of that cost a lot of money, and required a tremendous commitment from staff, volunteers and other stakeholders. Through these efforts, by September 2019, *San Quentin News* had raised more than \$1 million dollars to fund its operation.

In spite of recent political attacks on organizations that fund so-called DEI groups, which consist of threats of audits by the IRS, withdrawing 501(c)(3) non-profit status, and the withholding of federal grants, *San Quentin News* and other publications are able to thrive and maintain their presence and influence by pivoting toward digital distribution.

Simply put, to get ahead of the noise, *San Quentin News* is going digital. In doing so, we have to remain vigilant to changes in the industry if we are to survive. We have to navigate the intricacies of publishing, staffing, fundraising, and all the other opportunities for growth and expansion.

Circumstances dictate that we must move away from printing on paper to better serve our readers and remain a sustainable publication, and that's not a rumor.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU



SQNEWS IS GOING DIGITAL & WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Hello faithful readers of the *San Quentin News*,

As of September 2025, our newspaper is digital. The newspaper was printed and delivered to prisons, jails, donors, grant funders, and others.

Because tablets provided by vendors such as Global Tel*Link and Securus Technologies have been made available widely across the nation, incarcerated readers in more than 2,000 jails and prisons have access to *San Quentin News*.

Please let *San Quentin News* know what you think about the newspaper going digital. Do you prefer a hard copy of the newspaper or the digital version? Why? If you have accessed the newspaper on the tablets recently, what do

you think about it?

When you write, please send your letter to:

San Quentin News
Attention: Letter to the editor
1 Main Street
San Quentin, CA 94964

Thank you for your support over the years. —San Quentin News Staff

ROW

Continued from page 1

world," he said. "It's a complete shock." He said that on May 18, 2022, his case received a "complete reversal," but the attorney general has appealed, so now he is waiting for a ruling from the district court.

Since 1978, when California reinstated the death penalty (two years after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the death penalty legal), more than 800 people in California received death sentences. The state executed 13 of them at San Quentin. The first was Robert Alton Harris, on April 21, 1992. Harris spent 13 years on The Row. The last was Clarence Ray Allen, on January 17, 2006, after 23 years on The Row.

Alex Demolle, 50, incarcerated for 26 years, served most of that time on The Row. His commitment offense is out of Alameda County. Like many of his contemporaries from East Block, he experienced a specific distress when he got off the bus at CHCF.

"I thought it was a setup," said Demolle. He expected handcuffs and shackles, and a correctional officer escort to his housing unit, where he would serve most of his time in a cage. "Where's the gun tower?" he asked himself.

Demolle lives in an honor unit and works as a "pusher," a colloquial term at CHCF referring to Inmate Disability Assistant Program workers, as well as to some who work in the Peer Support Specialist Program. They serve to push other prisoners in wheelchairs at the sprawling medical facility. Prisoners in need of assistance do not have to ask for help. Pushers, or IDAP workers, will come to the aid of anyone they see who is mobility impaired.

"Just being able to move around freely without the gun being pointed at [me]," Demolle said, was both a shock and rewarding, especially, "without cuffs and being escorted everywhere." He said that on The Row, someone brought everything to him. "Everything you need done [at CHCF] you have to do it yourself." In addition to helping people, autonomy is what he likes about his move, and the fact that he doesn't have to sit in his cell all day. "I have to remind myself to get my tray" (of food).

Jerry Rodriguez, 52, is a Peer Support worker who spent 25 years on The Row. He said only two things can happen in that place: "Go home, or die there. I'm still condemned." Like others from The Row, he resides in the CHCF honor unit. He talked about how people with health issues experience a different type of incarceration. Helping them is his way to make amends for his past. "It's something we're actually doing in this health care facility." He said that his actions, along with self-help groups, are helping him to heal.

Rodriguez attends a self-help group called Turning Point. Many of the other attendees are from other prisons, on "treat-and-return" status. They come to the meetings in wheelchairs, on four-wheel walkers, and with canes. "We become rewired in a way that is psychologically backwards," Rodriguez said to the group about people who serve long terms in prison. "[This]

group is not mandatory. People show up because they want to."

California Governor Gavin Newsom placed a moratorium on executions in 2019. "[The state's] death penalty system has been, by all measures, a failure," he said. Newsom described how the death penalty "has discriminated against defendants who are mentally ill, Black and brown, or can't afford expensive legal representation..." the Death Penalty Information Center reported.

Demolle and Rodriguez are Black and brown, respectively. The former said he is trying for resentencing. Both work to help others as they work on themselves.

"Black defendants in California are up to 8.7 times more likely to be sentenced to death than defendants of other racial backgrounds," David Greenwald of the *Davis Vanguard* wrote. "Latino defendants are up to 6.2 times more likely to face death sentences." He offered other statistics to illustrate that any defendant is nearly nine times more probable to receive a death sentence when the victim of their crime is white.

According to the DPIC, in 2024, "California courts agreed that execution was not the appropriate punishment for at least 45 people on the state's death row."

As has been previously reported, Curtis Lee Ervin, 72, spent 38 years on The Row before his sentence was vacated. Evidence of racial bias was exposed in his trial. He was resentenced to manslaughter and paroled in August.

Donald F. Smith, 66, incarcerated since 1988, also spent decades on The Row before resentencing. He said, "The judge gave me LWOP" (life without the possibility of parole). He also lives in the honor unit.

Smith said another prisoner told him he did not want to take any self-help programs because he is a lifer, a long-standing, frequently cited reason. Smith said he explained, "This is an opportunity—The California Model."

San Quentin resident Loi T. Vo arrived on The Row at age 18 and spent 29 years there before he was resentenced to life with the possibility of parole. He is scheduled to appear before the Board of Parole Hearings next January.

Vo recalled his early years in prison and talked about his time on The Row, where he met Ricci Phillips. Phillips spent 38 years there before his death sentence was overturned for a third time, reduced to LWOP. Today Phillips resides at CHCF in the honor unit.

"Ricci always had a story," Vo said with a smile. "He would tell you stories that movies are made of. I miss our talks." He said Phillips trained him to work as a clerk while on The Row, and hopes for the best for him.

Phillips had more than stories when interviewed. He had a precise way of wording an unspoken truth. "We woke up every morning [on The Row] knowing the state had an office building filled with people, authorized by the taxpayers, to carefully and meticulously plan our death."

Contest for prison journalism revived after decades-long absence

SONEWS

Continued from page 1

"English is [Nora's] fourth language, but her writing for the *Paper Trail* is fluent and powerful," wrote one of the judges of the contest. "She connects issues to people, giving voice to both incarcerated individuals and staff. She approaches journalism with compassion and clarity, and I'm impressed by her breadth and gumption. In addition to her reporting, she handles art and layout for the paper, serves as Sergeant-at-Arms for the Inmate Advisory Council and facilitates LifeScripting workshops rooted in positive psychology. From this judge's vantage point, it appears Nora is a force."

San Quentin News's second-place award for Best Local Coverage went to Spanish Journalism Guild Chair Edwin E. Chavez for his article "60 residents commit to stopping Domestic Violence and heal in the process" that appeared in the July 2024 issue. "The ability of this article to explain a new program in the traditional news style impressed the judges. 'The process in which Chavez brought the reader into the inner workings of the Healing, Empowerment, Accountability, Restoration, and Transformation program without any editorialization was classic,' according to one judge."

"I am humbled by the privilege to be named second place in the nation. It goes to show that when we work as a team, we all win. This award is not only for me, it is for all of the *San Quentin News* staff as well," said Chavez.

The American Penal Press Contest originated in 1965 at the School of Journalism



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Warden C. Andes applauds the SQNews team

at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. It ended in 1991 because of "a growing emphasis on law-and-order policies and rising prison populations in the 1980s [that] meant a reduction in funding for, and tolerance of, prison newspapers," said a press release.

Pollen Initiative, a nonprofit that funds prison newspapers, including the *San Quentin News*, revived the contest in 2024. "We look forward to renewing this historic tradition and continuing to scale feedback across prison newsrooms to build a sense of common ground with the industry outside," said McQueen.

Known as the "Pulitzer Prize behind bars," Sawyer said *San Quentin News* won Best Newspaper in the American Penal Press Contest for the eighth time. The paper had previously won in 1965, 1966, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1981, and 1983. This year's contest had 179 submissions from 21 prison publications.

CROOKED

Continued from page 1

his own personal gain, Mr. Spolin committed egregious misconduct," said Chief Trial Counsel George Cardona of the State Bar of California in a press release. "His disbarment serves to protect the public and maintain trust in the legal profession."

The press release said Spolin faced two Notices of Disciplinary Charges filed by Office of Chief Trial Counsel in August and November 2024 for charging residents of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation system and their families for his preparation and submission of requests for resentencing to the Los Angeles and Orange County district attorneys.

Spolin failed to advise the clients that they did not meet prioritization criteria applied by the Los Angeles County District Attorney, published on its website, and that the Orange County District Attorney would act only in response to requests directly submitted by the CDCR.

Spolin also failed to tell his clients that both district attorneys' offices had advised multiple times that resentencing requests submitted on behalf of inmates would not result in any action on their part. Bloomberg Law said the Los Angeles District Attorney's office told Spolin in a 2022 letter, "Please keep in mind that contacting our office to provide unsolicited information regarding a particular individual or to ask for an update is not helpful and, in fact, severely detracts from our ability to review these cases in a fair, orderly and expeditious manner." Spolin kept up the practice, anyway, flooding both offices with petitions.

Spolin's fees usually ran in the five-figures. A story in the January issue of *San Quentin*

San Quentin Death Row opened in (1854)

First state-conducted execution at San Quentin (March 3, 1893)

1893

California governor places moratorium on executions (March 13, 2019)

2019

Number of executions in San Quentin history (514)

514

Attorney gave false hope of reduced sentences

News detailed that SQRC resident Troy Varnado paid \$18,500 for a commutation application and a resentencing petition. In 2022, SQRC resident Anthony Oliver paid \$20,000 for the same services. SQRC resident Ferdinand Flowers paid Spolin \$9,000 to \$12,000 for resentencing. Spolin failed all three clients. The *San Quentin News* has learned that many other San Quentin residents have engaged Spolin's services, none of them successfully.

In June, Spolin entered a no-contest plea in State Bar Court to professional misconduct acknowledging that he had offered "false hope" about their chances of reducing their sentences and had charged excessive fees. The "no-contest plea" meant that Spolin did not admit guilt, but accepted the findings of misconduct. Spolin went on involuntary inactive enrollment effective June 20, which prevented him from practicing law while awaiting the California Supreme Court ruling on his case.

The Court also ordered that Spolin pay restitution of more than \$63,000, plus interest, to the eight clients or their designees listed in the suit. *San Quentin News* learned that a lawyer with offices in Philadelphia and New York offered to sue Spolin on behalf of CDCR residents, but attempts to speak with the lawyer have not succeeded. Repeated attempts by the *San Quentin News* to reach the State Bar of California have also failed. The disbarment has no effect on Spolin's ability to practice in other states in which Spolin reportedly maintained offices.

Residents interested in reading the case should consult Lexis-Nexis and search for "Spolin on Discipline, Cal., No. S292012."

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Transitional program provides much needed resources

By Ricky Ransom
Journalism Guild Writer

Steven Rice, the workforce development director of Code Tenderloin, an organization focused on free programming, community outreach, removing barriers for vulnerable communities, and people living below the poverty line, visited San Quentin.

The organization discussed job readiness, integrative community level health work, financial literacy resources, transitional housing partnerships, technology and entrepreneur development, and AI opportunities with residents in Chapel B.

Rice, a formerly-incarcerated native of Southern California's San Fernando Valley, paroled from CTF-Soledad four years ago after serving 34 years. "However, I ain't free, until we're all free," Rice said to the 35 residents in attendance. To this sentiment, the room erupted in applause.

Rice encouraged residents to stay committed to their rehabilitation, education, and programming. From his vantage point, prisons today,

especially San Quentin, can provide a multitude of educational experiences.

Rice said his involvement with Code Tenderloin while incarcerated was pivotal in changing the narrative in his life, giving him something to believe in and propelling him forward.

"The best decision I ever made was getting involved with Code Tenderloin," Rice said.

Rice went on to describe the organization's mandatory classes designed to support participants in their transition from incarceration to freedom. The Job Readiness Program assists with soft skills, résumé writing, and interview presentation. The Community Health Worker program engages individuals in community-level health services and treatment. Rice heads both of these courses.

Once the classes are completed, individuals gain access to every job in Code Tenderloin's employment network.

Rice said everybody has a "secret sauce," meaning that what works for one person's professional development may not work for another. He

reflected that some people have a very specific career path in mind, and noted that Code Tenderloin launched an Entrepreneur Development Program to assist these individuals achieve their dreams.

Rice addressed concerns about transportation for those who plan to come to Code Tenderloin, sharing that the company provides Bay Area Rapid Transport cards and Uber rides. The resources, however, don't end there.

"Transitional housing, I got connection there too. I am personally in and out of the Dream Center on the regular and we're [Code Tenderloin] right across the street from GEO (a reentry services corporation that provides residential, shelter care, and community-based rehabilitative educational programs for parolees).

People in there see my face daily."

Removing barriers like transportation, Rice said, will help enable him to continue to do this work in the most impactful way.

"Just show up," he told residents. "I'll do the rest."

U.S. in a state of hyper-incarceration

By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

Despite ongoing efforts in some states to reduce the prison population, the U.S. remains in a state of hyper-incarceration. Some estimate a current incarceration rate of between 600 to 700 people per 100,000, according to a Vanderbilt Law School article by Nate Luce. Returning to a preventive justice approach may reduce the U.S. incarceration rate, noted the article.

San Quentin Rehabilitation Center resident Tony Chavez, 56, recalls when incarceration rates started to climb during President Ronald Reagan's tough-on-crime years of the 1980s.

"I remember when Nancy Reagan initiated the 'Just say no to drugs' campaign and everybody was getting locked up," Chavez said.

It was during that period that the current, retributive, desert-based model of punishment emerged, one focused on the offender's convictions, including previous crimes. Luce refers to this approach as "punishing the crime, not the criminal." Some of its features included the ideology of mandatory minimum sentences and the Three-Strike Law.

The resulting increase in punitive sentencing drove hyper-incarceration, according to Christopher Slobogin, Director of the Criminal Justice Program at Vanderbilt. According to the 2025 World Almanac Book of Facts, the violent crime incarceration

rate in the U.S. in 1991 rose to a historic high of "758 per 100,000 populations."

"There are dozens of reasons for this increase in punitiveness, but a key one is the move toward desert-based sentencing," Slobogin wrote.

Before hyper-incarceration, about 50 years ago, the criminal justice system's primary goal was preventative justice, and it used an indeterminate approach to sentencing that focused on management and risk assessment. That approach is known as "punishing the criminal, not the crime," according to Luce.

But by the 1970s, naysayers challenged that model, basing their challenge on criticism of what were then inaccurate recidivism rate predictions, weak rehabilitation programs, and bad outcomes from decisions of incompetent parole boards.

Slobogin argues that a revamped preventive justice approach, one that incorporates retributive factors, can address those concerns. In his book, "Rehabilitating Criminal Justice," Slobogin notes that advanced understanding of brain science, genetics, and behavior has increased insight to the causes of crime, as well as the ability to predict and prevent it.

"We still have much to learn, (but) today we know considerably more about how to implement preventive justice than we did when the reign of indeterminate sentencing came to an end," he wrote.

This new model would include consideration of psychological characteristics, weighing factors of criminal history, age, and diagnosis. The use of these professional judgment tools should be cornerstones of a better program. Employment of modern techniques to assess case factors and evaluate criminal threat levels when considering sentencing or parole eligibility could substantially lower incarceration rates, wrote Luce.

Other features of a revamped preventive justice system would include allowing persons to serve part of sentences in community-based programs, depending on the risk level of the incarcerated individual. Sentences would not exceed a maximum range, and offenders not classified as high risk should parole after serving their minimum sentence.

In Slobogin's words, "Done properly, a preventive justice system should significantly reduce prison populations."

SQRC resident Jamie Van Cleave, 54, said he is back in prison on a parole violation without a new conviction. He's served an additional four years since being incarcerated and said the punishment does not fit the violation.

"Our parole system is broken," Van Cleave said. "I've more than paid my debt for a non-violent violation, now the state is just warehousing me and wasting the taxpayers' money."

Prosecutor-initiated resentencing expands to Republican-led state

By Michael Callahan
Layout Design

Justice reform continued to take shape out West as Utah became the first Republican-led state to implement Prosecutor Initiated Resentencing.

"A prosecutor has a vested interest to make certain that anyone released under their authority does not reoffend. Who better to make sure there is not a mistake in judgment?" said San Quentin resident Andrew Kramer.

In 2018, For the People crafted a law, the first of its kind, AB 2942. The nonprofit has worked with about 60 prosecutors around the nation to resentence more than 1,000 people.

"As a former U.S. Attorney for the District of Utah, I understand firsthand the weight of a prosecutor's discretion and the long-term consequences of sentencing decisions," Brett Tolman, Executive director of Right on Crime said. "[PIR] ensures our system is not only tough but also fair – empowering prosecutors to correct excessive or outdated sentences when appropriate. Supporting this tool strengthens both public safety and the integrity of our justice system."

Resentencing considers victims' input, the person's past, the crime, reentry plans, and outdated laws. PIR is a mechanism embedded

in accountability, justice and fairness for victims, survivors, and offenders, according to *Rand.org*.

The article stated that prosecutors, in the interest of justice, can petition to the county court of conviction if, based on new laws and an indication that the incarcerated person no longer poses a threat to public safety, they may be resentenced.

Kramer said, in his opinion he believes the rehabilitative process is thorough and comprehensive. He said California's number one factor is whether or not the individual poses a current risk of violence, so those in authority are intimately familiar with the facts of individual cases and are in the best position for vetting suitability.

"Nothing can replace the loss of a loved one. There may never be adequate justice or satisfaction for the victim," Kramer said.

Similar to California, the parole board evaluation is conducted thorough a review of the individual's carceral history, behavior while incarcerated, and reentry plans. Victims have the opportunity to participate in the process.

Kramer said a liaison who can attest to an incarcerated individual's character and work can establish a plan and goals that can help a

person get recommended for resentencing.

The five other states that have implemented PIR are California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, and Minnesota. Overall, there have been more than 850 PIRs. California has instituted 227 PIRs, 174 of those in 2024. In 2023, incarcerated Californians resentenced under PIR recidivated at a rate of 12%. Nearly 80% of persons resentenced had committed crimes of robbery, assault, battery, and over 85% were sentenced to excessive terms through enhancements of prior terms, according to *Rand.org*.

Criminal Justice nonprofits Right on Crime and For the People worked collaboratively with lawmakers and state officials in Utah to give preference solely to the prosecutors who brought the charges. PIR is in line with conservative principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, and safer communities.

Similar to California, the parole board evaluation is conducted thorough a review of the individual's carceral history, behavior while incarcerated, and reentry plans. Victims have the opportunity to participate in the process.

"Tons of financial resources and man power goes to the carceral system. By reducing the incarcerated population the focus can shift toward preventing crime and making the communities safer," Kramer said.

Pretrial diversion program offers rehabilitation outside of prison

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

An offender's dream is to avoid jail, which is not always possible, but with public support, a new jail diversion program will increase their chances.

A program called Executive Treatment Solutions steers minor offenders toward change through rehabilitation to avoid incarceration.

Many people in the United States face incarceration for low-level crimes, while unaware of an alternative option, according to *EIN Presswire*.

"When someone is charged with a DUI, drug offense, or even theft, the courts often want to see accountability, not just excuses," according to ETS.

ETS is a countrywide program approved by the court system that looks towards reform. The program teams defense attorneys up with people facing jail terms, the attorneys acting as a conduit between legal defense and

behavioral reform.

ETS prepares a customized recovery plan, and presents it to the court as the best way to decrease the chances of a defendant re-offending, stated the news article.

The plans include a structured therapy program, drug and alcohol testing, and an educational plan. These rehabilitative measures have gained support from the public as alternatives to incarceration.

This type of detailed plan can help attorneys create a powerful presentation helping their client advocate for jail diversion.

The program exists throughout the United States as a pre-trial alternative, a diversion from incarceration for people who meet the eligibility requirements. Many people never hear about this alternative until they have been imprisoned, noted the *Presswire*.

"Our job is to help clients show—with documentation, progress reports, and real commitment—that they're doing the work to change,"

according to Executive Treatment Solutions.

A person facing their first driving under the influence charge can receive a full dismissal, with ETS ensuring their client stays compliant, remaining on track to stay clean and sober.

The reach of the program extends beyond a DUI, to include theft, drug possession, and mental health-related offenses, making it possible for people to qualify under state and county diversion laws, according to the news article.

The Pretrial Diversion Program's purpose is to assist the court system that often is too busy or lacks the resources to enable rehabilitation. PDP's mission is simple; help the client show the courts they're serious about changing their lives.

"Most people just want a chance to fix their mistake and move forward. Diversion gives them that opportunity—if they know where to turn," according to ETS.

Limited childcare in drug treatment programs concerns women

A woman's right to choose between having custody of her children or substance abuse treatment is a difficult choice.

April Lee was drugged and sexually assaulted at a bar in Philadelphia, Penn. She was unable to identify the assailant and did not want to relive the traumatic experience, according to *Mother Jones*.

As a result, Lee coped by masking her trauma with opioid drug use. She made

a decision to live as a functioning addict.

"You take [drugs] and you don't feel anything," Lee said. "I was able to take the kids back and forth to school. Go to the laundromat, go to the corner store. The drugs made it easier, or so I thought."

Lee said, she would rather use drugs than be separated from her children. The limited childcare in drug treatment is the primary reason why women do not seek treatment. They fear being separated

from their child.

State and federal officials have been aware of the lack of drug rehab for mothers dating back to the disastrous 1980s crack cocaine epidemic, noted *Mother Jones*.

The federal government has implemented instructions to state agencies to set aside funds for drug treatment of new mothers, but few states have met that requirement.

Research by The Marshall Project has uncovered that state governments that punish

women for drug use during pregnancy have higher rates of overdose and infants showing signs of drug withdrawals, stated the news article.

The Marshall Project says that studies show newborns taken from their mothers are less likely to smile, compared to children who were not removed. When a mother and child remain together during the mother's rehab, there is a better outcome for the mother and child.

"It's a dead end. There

are no facilities out there to help them," said Eloisa Lopez, a former member of Arizona's maternal mortality committee.

Lee's own mother struggled with cocaine addiction; her mother never had the option to receive treatment. When Lee was a teenager, her mother passed away from complications related to AIDS, likely contracted during her addiction.

Lee ultimately entered a recovery center, and after

years in treatment, she was reunited with her children. She now helps women whose children have been removed due to their substance abuse.

Lee still finds it challenging to get women into treatment; they have been labeled a moral failure by law enforcement. For many women, that lack of treatment remains a matter of life and death, according to *Mother Jones*.

—By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

GS Warriors and outside volunteers Prison Sports Ministries post win with big second half

Lacob said the best part of the event is when new people are brought in and have the opportunity to share stories about each other's experiences. He also mentioned how much he loved to see the formerly incarcerated on the outside and touched on the fact that all interactions with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons cause change to people on both sides.

The game began after the traditional player introductions of the Golden State Warriors team, which included a combination of GS Warriors front office staff and Prison Sports Ministries outside volunteers; they played against a team of resident players drawn from both the SQ Warriors and SQ Kings.

SQ led by a score of 26-21 at the end of the first quarter before the pros outscored the home team 26-15 in the 2nd period to take a 47-41 lead heading into half-time.

At the half, formerly incarcerated person Brian Asey Gonsoulin; who went home from a reduced 84-years-to-life sentence, spoke about the power of the program.

Golden State Warriors' public information representative, Michael Ravina, attended his first game. "The team talks about coming here all the time, and if they don't win they'll get shit when they get home," he joked. "Obviously there's a lot of camaraderie between these teams [because] we all want to build people up, we want people out there instead of in here. That's why rehabilitation is so important."

The second half included the visitors out-scoring the home team 17-8 to take a commanding 64-49 lead at the end of the third period.

Although the home team mounted a comeback by outscoring the GS Warriors 22-14 in the fourth quarter, their efforts proved to be too little, too late as the GS Warriors won the game 78-71.

"Because of this event, more people get interested and want to play and we get local and national recognition," said Charles "Pookie" Sylvester, 56, an 11-year member of the Kings program.

"It was a good day. It was fun to watch," said Correctional Officer Rybang, who has been here since 2008.

"When the GS Warriors come in to spend the morning with people inside, it highlights a better understanding of incarceration and the benefits of having a thriving sports program. Everyone involved with the event is able to learn something from each other and have a better understanding of each other's life situation," said physical education teacher and Coach Kuntal Bhatt.

Teren Armstrong became the first Tasmanian-born NBA player when he signed a one-year rookie contract with Golden State. He shared his experience of coming to SQRC.

"Walking down the ramp for his first time is an experience I will always remember," said Armstrong. "I've never done anything like this. There's no way to compare this to anything else."

"The two worlds aren't too far apart," he concluded. "I feel the positivity here."



1) Valtice drives to the basket

2) Keyshawn Strickland drives to the basket over defender

3) Golden State Warrior staff Noel Hightower dunks the basketball

4) Sunny dunks pre-game

5) Valtice to the hole

6) Darius Poole bucket and the foul

7) Golden State Warriors with Warden C. Andes and Sgt. J. Graves

Right: David Rodriguez

Below: Carlos Smith plays chess with GS Warrior

Left: Three point shot attempt over Alonso Craft

Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

11TH Warriors game



"The two worlds aren't too far apart. I feel positivity here."
— Warriors rookie Teren Armstrong is first Tasmanian-born NBA player

Veterans play flag football on 9/11

By Ricky Ransom
Journalism Guild Writer

"When 9/11 happened I was out of the country and didn't get the news about what happened until almost 24 hours later," Tina R. said. "So when 9/11 events like the Buddy Bowl take place, it's an opportunity for me to take it all in."

The event reunited SQRC residents with flag football alum, Andre Jackson, whose association with SQ's sports program goes back more than a decade.

Jackson said COVID diminished the prison's flag football relationships with outside organizations. "It's good to be back. I see some familiar faces that are still here. I wish they hurry up and go home," Jackson said jokingly.

College students, Gavin F. (UC Santa Cruz), Dillon F. and, Kappa Alpha fraternity member Rocco M. (UC Berkeley) played for the Buddy Bowl team.

Dillon F., who scored a TD, said he didn't know what he expected before coming to San Quentin.

"This is great. I'm thrilled to see everyone is cool here. I'm blown away," said Dillon F.

Gavin F. had trepidation before attending as well. "It's a positive energy here, you can feel it, thanks for having us."

Ladd, a former San Quentin resident and disabled Iraq war vet lost part of his leg during an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attack while being a part of a Marine convoy that was contracted by KBR Halliburton.

"My convoy was attacked three times before and, on those occasions my armored vehicle held, however the fourth time it did not," said Ladd. "I don't remember much about the explosion, but when I came to, I took one step out of the vehicle and, immediately hit the ground."

Ladd looked down at his leg, saw that it was bad, but remembers he didn't feel any excruciating pain.

"I was in the hospital for months," Ladd said. "After several unsuccessful surgeries, when the doctors came in to do the next one, I told them; 'Just cut it off and they did'."

Ladd saw West Block (housing unit), where he was housed in the early nineties and then asked if reception was still housed.

"I can feel this place, it has a different presence now. I have traveled quite a bit and have had a pretty good life overall," Ladd said. "I need to find out what I can do here to help. I can't be out there having fun playing ball with the guys. But I really would like to contribute in any way I can."

Veterans Group San Quentin sponsor Tina R. paid homage to administrators like Dr. Anderson whom, "Made the event happen and did most of the heavy lifting."

Kidney donor's dream to play baseball in San Quentin comes true

By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

the dugout to watch the game.

The visiting So Cal Grays, a mixed group of international and Southern California players, wore a classic uniform design that paid homage to the original Negro League "Homestead Grays."

Starting pitcher for the SQ Giants Victor Picazo, led the home team to its first victory over the Grays, 17-5.

The visiting team roster included Grandpa Glenn Sailer, 86, son Glenn "Buzzy" Sailer, 62, who played college ball and on a Mexican league team, and Grandson Weston Sailer, 36.

A tearful Grandpa Sailer said, "When we come here, these guys act like professionals and they're always so respectful, that's why we love coming back."

The Grays infield line-up included members of the Pone family. The father and son duo of Bobby and Tanner Pone covered shortstop and third base, while Bobby's nephew Logan and niece Shea covered the first and second base positions.

Starting pitcher for the SQ Giant's Patrick Poteat was victorious in game two which ended with a final score of 7-4.

The Grays team Manager, Dale Eby, said while playing in Cuba, he met Mateo Jackson, a European player who lives in France. Some Grays players then reunited with Jackson in Costa Rica to play another game.

"You never know who you are going to meet when you're playing baseball," Eby said. "The common denominator, in the one degree of separation, is the love of the game."

Jackson said having the chance to play on the Field of Dreams gave him the opportunity to check of another box on his bucket list. "I've played ball in Cuba twelve times, Costa Rica a half dozen times, Spain, Mexico, and France, but all started in the United States," Jackson said.

He added, "I finally got called up to the 'big show' and I feel this place seems like it's helping people do better. It's an honor to play here."

Throughout the event, the SQ Giant players made their way over to Thompson to shake the hand of the man who went to such lengths to help another human being; their coach.

"Thank you for bringing our coach back to us" said a player, as he approached the donor who man who saved his life.

"Your welcome," Thompson replied as he continued cheering on the home team wearing his new SQ Giants Jersey while enjoying the game.

Education key for individual success, self-worth, and transformation

By Michael Callahan
Layout Design

For incarcerated students obtaining a bachelor's degree, life is changing. Phillip Hernandez envisioned that one day he would graduate from high school, but college seemed like a dream to him and his mother.

"Coming back into prison I had a sense of being a failure. I had a deep sense of loss and I did not know what to do, but I was going to do something," Hernandez said. "Going to school was the first logical decision I made."

Hernandez is 49 years old and has been incarcerated for 13 years. He was 18 when he dropped out of high school in the 11th grade because he was told he was too old to finish school. He said that at the time he believed he had a learning disability, and instead of going to continuation school he got into the carpentry industry and never looked back — until he came to prison.

According to *Best Colleges* reports in 2014, just 1% of

incarcerated adults in the U.S. held a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree—vastly below the ~17% among non-incarcerated U.S. adults.

The success of prison education programs is measured by two factors: the rate of re-arrest and the individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment upon release.

The reports indicated consistently that higher education reduces an individual's chances of returning to crime and increases the chances of finding better jobs. A higher level of education increases the probability of post-release employment, which reduces the chance of recidivism.

"I saw prison as an opportunity to finally finish high school and get my GED. Once I reached that milestone, I wanted more. I realized if I applied myself, I was smart and could achieve great things," Hernandez said.

In 2016, Hernandez was incarcerated at Corcoran and obtained his high school

diploma. He continued to pursue higher education and earned an Associates of Arts degree in sociology/ human and behavioral sciences, and another AA in arts and humanities. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in the fall of 2026.

He said obtaining an education while incarcerated was a challenge in itself, but he also struggled with low self-esteem and lacked support for a higher education. "I never felt my mother was ever proud of me growing up," Hernandez said. "It was an emotional moment for me to have my mother attend my college ceremony. In that moment she was truly proud of something I did."

In late August, Hernandez and about 25 other incarcerated students signed up for the newly offered bachelor's program at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center. The opportunity marks a major milestone for correctional education as the newly constructed education center should open in time for the Fall '26 semester.

Through the program, incarcerated students take one or two courses per semester toward a bachelor's degree. The coursework equips students with essential thinking skills, writing abilities, and experiences that foster personal transformations.

The school-to-prison pipeline and the cycle of recidivism are two deeply interconnected issues rooted in the same societal dilemmas, but the solution can be partially rooted in our systems of higher education. By educating people who already incarcerated, there can be hope for a society that is not only better educated, but is safer and breaking cycles of multi-generational oppression.

"I remember them handing me my gown. It felt surreal. The process of zipping up the gown and sliding it on felt like a dream. The energy I felt with those around me was infectious; it was one of my proudest moments in prison," Hernandez said.

SIDE BAR: Industries generally more felon-friendly (Felonfriendlyenvironment.odt)

- Skilled Trades & Technical Fields
- Electrician, HVAC, plumbing, welding, construction project management
- Often prioritize certifications and skills over background
- Information Technology (IT)
- Coding, software development, web design
- Cybersecurity support
- Tech companies sometimes use "skills-based hiring" and care less about records
- Entrepreneurship & self-employment
- Consulting, online business, real estate wholesaling, e-commerce
- Gives full control and avoids background check barriers
- Social services & nonprofits
- Many reentry and recovery organizations hire people with lived experience.
- Case management, peer counseling, program coordination
- Transportation & logistics
- CDL drivers (depending on offense), warehouse management, supply chain analysis
- Sales & customer service
- Retail management, insurance sales, independent contracting
- Commission-based work is often more open to backgrounds.

Incarcerated-built furniture donated to at-risk youth

By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

San Quentin staff and residents came together in a continued effort to support the homeless at-risk youth of Richmond, Calif.

In collaboration with Tiny Home Village Spirit organization, SQRC furthered their aim to build a relationship with the outside community by building furniture for those now living in the new Tiny Homes.

Sally Hindman, the Bay Area director of emergency housing for at-risk youth, said the new housing is the first legal place in Richmond where young unhoused people can find shelter and get off the streets.

"A lot of folks at San Quentin come from rough childhoods and ended up in prison because they had to make hard choices just to survive," SQ resident Benjamin Greenspon said.

After the SQRC residents of the Bay Area Amends Committee held a successful food drive for the Bay Area youth earlier in the year, Warden C. Andes encouraged those involved in the initiative to continue their efforts.

"Thank you so much to San Quentin for your continued support," Hindman said. "You really are making the difference in these young

people's lives."

The SQRC volunteer project included the purchase of lumber by residents and outside donors, then the construction of four picnic tables and 18 Adirondack chairs for the new homes.

Pallets of lumber and hardware arrived at the facility's plant operations where residents cut wood into pieces for the SQ members of Kids Creating Awareness Together and BAAC programs to assemble into furniture.

The smell of fresh-cut pine and the sound of screw guns driving wood fasteners during the assembly process filled the air in the South Block building of the prison.

Resource staff A. Torres supervised the venture. After asking the Tiny Home Village Spirit organization how SQRC can continue to help, they replied that they need furniture.

Torres said she sponsors residents in both the KidCAT and BAAC programs on their continued efforts to give back to communities.

"These guys had a vision and put this project together," Torres said. "I see nothing but hard work and dedication by them to make things better."

SQ resident Kenny York donated \$1,000 to the cause and said his new focus in life is being part of the solution, not

the problem.

"This is an opportunity to give back to a community that all I did was take from when I was out there on the streets," York said.

Resident Greenspon said not every young person has a fair start at succeeding in life and has the strong foundation of a safe place to sleep; they can find themselves out on the streets just trying to survive.

Greenspon added that when a person lives with anxiety and feelings of abandonment, it can often lead to an individual turning to crime or drugs to cope.

Greenspon said it's important for people to have the opportunity to concentrate on studying or getting a job, instead of worrying about where they are going to sleep or get their next meal.

"We want those who are struggling to know that they are not alone," Greenspon said. "Some of us might not be here if we had some support, so this is our way of helping them have one less thing to worry about."

Hindman said the kindness and empathy shown by the residents of The Q will go a long way in helping these young people succeed. "San Quentin continues to show up for these guys," she added. "I thank you for that; it really means a lot."

EVENT

Residents reflect on 9/11 and walk to honor lost lives

The Veterans Group of San Quentin hosted a memorial event during Mental Wellness week to commemorate the 24-year anniversary since 2,977 victims were killed in the 911 terrorist attacks.

In collaboration with the Mental Health Department, VGSQ and SQ residents participated in multiple activities to solidify the importance of remembering, grieving and honoring the bravery of the thousands of lives lost on that tragic day.

SQ resident Jose Maya said he was only one-year-old when these attacks occurred.

"It's important to recognize and give gratitude to those who were willing to die to save others," Maya said. "To hear all these stories from everybody really shows the impact the attacks continue to have on our country."

The stage on the Lower-Yard was the centerpiece for the memorial event, the VGSQ started the event with a performance of the National Anthem and the Star-Spangled Banner while the SQ Color Guard displayed the United States National flag.

VGSQ resident Steve Drown delivered an emotional speech that began by asking the crowd, "where were you on September 11, 2001."

Drown's personal recollection



Photo by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

First responders memorial board

of that day included seeing on TV the North Tower of the World Trade Center hit by a jet liner on. He said he saw people jumping from the building nearly 100 floors up, to avoid being burned to death.

While viewing the tragedy on TV Drown recalled the towers collapsing and killing thousands that were still trapped inside.

"That began one of the most heart-wrenching days for me and escalated into a tragedy that affected all of us," Drown said. "It became one of the most tragic events in American history."

He added that nations that enjoy their freedom must actively fight terror, and today humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further

freedoms and triumph over all these foes.

The VGSQ held a moment of silence and rang a bell four separate times as the morning progressed to recognize each time hijackers seized control of the jet liners filled with of passengers.

SQ Mental Health Department held a memorial walk around SQ's Lower Yard in honor of the nearly 400 Police Officers, Firefighters and Medical Personnel that rushed to the World Trade Center in an effort to rescue the people.

Suicide Prevention coordinator Dr. E. Anderson alongside Dr. Ortiz distributed sticky labels to participants with the names and faces of first responders who made the ultimate sacrifice in an effort to save U.S. citizens.

Hundreds of people lined up after the memorial walk to post sticky labels on a memorial board in honor of all the lives lost.

Included on the board was a previous message written by Police Officer Joseph Campbell wrote that said "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself," according to Campbell.

— By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

Residents expressing insight and remorse leaves impression on KidCAT sponsor

does not define them, that healing and change is possible. Seeing that transformation unfold each week reminds me why this work matters. It's not just about rehabilitation, but also about restoration of humanity. To be a part of that has been incredibly moving.

Witnessing the growth of others in this program has helped me apply this curriculum to myself. Until I joined the KidCAT program, I did not realize how much my past was controlling me. KidCAT isn't your typical self-help group. It doesn't offer surface-level solutions or ask us to just "do better." It invites participants to go back to their roots and understand how childhood trauma, violence, abandonment, and early life experiences shaped behaviors. To be vulnerable may seem dangerous to many, but the KidCAT space is different. In those circles, participants find trust, confidentiality, and respect.

Through guided exercises and honest conversations, I started identifying patterns in my relationships. I used to struggle with boundaries, either letting people walk all over me or shutting them out completely. KidCAT taught me the importance of healthy boundaries and how to say "no" without guilt, how to advocate for my needs, and how to respect the needs of others. KidCAT trains us to build friendships and relationships based on honesty, trust, and mutual respect. Perhaps most importantly, KidCAT helped me, and I'm sure many others, get in touch with emotions, not just the emotions I used to feel most comfortable with, like anger or pride, but also sadness, fear, shame, and even joy. I learned that emotions aren't weaknesses; they're signals. They're also messages from within that tell us when something needs attention or care. By naming my emotions and expressing them in

healthy ways, I am more self-aware. To anyone incarcerated who feels stuck, angry, or broken, I want to say this: there's a path to healing. It takes courage and strength to look inward. It takes strength to be vulnerable, but it's worth it. KidCAT teaches that true freedom isn't just about release from prison, but about freeing yourself from the emotional chains you've carried for too long.

Just like everyone else, I still have much self-work to do. Healing is a journey, not a destination. It's not easy to face the truth about yourself. But when you do it in a space that's rooted in compassion, accountability, and growth, like in KidCAT, you don't just survive. You begin to heal.

I'd also like to recognize the dedication and compassion of the KidCAT facilitators. Their tireless effort, and commitment to bettering others and themselves, is very inspiring.

YOUTH



By A. Torrez
KidCAT Sponsor

Sponsoring and supporting the KidCAT group has been richly rewarding, bringing me a deep sense of joy and purpose. Watching incarcerated individuals commit to inner-directed examination and understanding, while confronting difficult truths, has been inspirational. There's something powerful about witnessing a person realize that their worst mistake

Por César Martínez
Staff Writer

Una tribu Nahua conocidos como "Aztecas", llegaron al valle de México trayendo sus propias creencias, cultura, gastronomía, folklor y deidades, dejando una herencia que continua hasta el día de hoy inspirando a generaciones, sobre la importancia cultural y su expresión en danza; con un profundo significado de devoción a lo terrenal y divino.

La Danza Azteca, es la representación de historias, períodos de tiempos de cultivo, fertilidad de la mujer entre otros. Aunado a la representación de los elementos naturales como; agua, fuego, tierra y viento, junto con los cuatro puntos cardinales; norte, sur, este y oeste. Estos eventos, elementos y puntos cardinales son la conexión con la Madre Tierra personificando sus lazos

con lo espiritual y el cosmos. Los danzantes mediaban a través de estas expresiones como una manera en la que ellos podían apaciguar, adorar, rogar y agradecer a sus deidades, bailando en eventos importantes y religiosos de esta tribu Nahua.

En el Centro de Rehabilitación de San Quentin el programa de Danza Cuauhōcōlōti, usa esta danza como una forma de rehabilitación a través del ritmo y la meditación, en donde los participantes aprenden una cultura en donde la religión y lo supernatural genere motivaciones, estructura emocional positiva e identidad a una civilización Azteca.

"La oportunidad de representar mi cultura en una forma positiva me anima, porque en las pandillas hacen creer que tienes que ganarte tus tatuajes, de ser digno y valiente", dijo Gabino Madera

residente de SQ y miembro de los danzantes, originario de Sacramento California.

Silvia Amador Analista en Relaciones Legales en SQ y patrocinadora del grupo cultural Cuauhōcōlōti, describe las metas del grupo tales como la rehabilitación a través de la exploración cultural e historia Azteca, trabajando con los participante en aprender a mejorar sus habilidades en la comunicación y promoviendo las resoluciones de conflictos grupales o individuales.

De acuerdo a Jhon M.D. Phol explica como el Códice Boturini, narra la historia Azteca, quienes llegaron al lago de Texcoco siguiendo la profecía de su Dios Huitzilopochtli, quien hablo desde la profundidad de una cueva a la última de las siete tribus: manadas Chichimecas. Huitzilopochtli auguró que esta tribu se establecería

en un islote, en donde verían a un águila devorando a una serpiente parada sobre un nopal. Tiempo después, Tenochtitlán fue fundado oficialmente en el año 1325 D.C. convirtiéndose en la capital que subyugó la mayor parte del centro de México entre los siglos XIV al XVI.

Mateo Villanueva en su artículo llamado "Entendimiento del Rol de La Danza Azteca en Simbolismo", explica que, así como la danza tenía un significado, la vestimenta, accesorios y colores, que vestían los danzantes contaba también con su propio significado.

La ropa era elaborada con pieles de animales tales como el jaguar y siervo, estas pieles eran escogidas por su simbolismo con la conexión de la Tierra y lo divino. Las plumas de aves como el águila, representaban al dios Huitzilopochtli.

También usaban espejos, semillas, y caracoles que en náhuatl son conocidas como "atecocolli".

El humo del copal simbolizaba la purificación a los danzantes y el lugar donde se llevaba a cabo la ceremonia de la danza.

Los color representaban diferentes elementos o deidades; el rojo la sangre y el sacrificio, mientras que el azul al agua o cielo.

los instrumentos usados en las danzas tal como el tambor, representaba los latidos del corazón, la flauta al sonido del aire y el aliento de la vida. Todos estos sonidos, movimientos e indumentarias, realzan el ambiente durante cada interpretación.

Miguel Ángel Rodríguez residente y fundador del grupo, comentó que la danza es algo que lleva en la sangre, porque viene de una familia con más

de 400 años compartiendo esta tradición en la cual su abuela influyó demasiado en su gusto por esta tradición. Él ahora tiene la oportunidad de compartir su experiencia y conocimiento en forma de rehabilitación con sus demás compañeros.

"Me gustaría que en cada institución vean la rehabilitación en esta forma", "en cada evento, es para ellos honrar a sus ancestros, tradiciones y una buena forma de mostrarlo a todos", dijo Amador quien trabaja con la comunidad hispana, labor que para ella es una forma de honrar sus raíces Oaxaqueñas.

"Te, imman! Mone, ¡Monemachthi!!, ¡Arique in?, Mach Amo Mexica, ¡Actique! ¡Cuauhōcōlōti!! Timoquetzatzl, Momoztle a un Cualli Ce Mihuil Mique, Cuauhōcōlōti, ¡Tiahu!!", gritan con gozo los miembros del grupo antes de cada práctica o presentación.

Recorte multimillonario en asistencia para sobrevivientes de crímenes

Por Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

Son víctimas y sobrevivientes de crímenes, quienes pueden ser afectadas por la estrategia anti-inmigrante por parte del Departamento de Justicia, al recortar \$212 millones en fondos, según reportó la Oficina del Fiscal General de Nueva York el 18 de agosto.

Letitia James Fiscal General del estado, se unió a una demanda junto con 20 abogados más en contra del DOJ, dicha demanda está en contra del bloqueo de fondos designados bajo el Decreto Víctimas de Crímenes; "The

Victim of Crime Act" VOCA por su siglas en inglés.

Bajo este Decreto el congreso estadounidense había aprobado fondos anualmente, otorgando más de un billón de dólares en subsidios a los 50 estados de la nación. Estos fondos son destinados a las/o sobrevivientes, para cubrir gastos que van desde servicios médicos, consejería, refugios, y compensación por perdidas de salarios.

También impide que las víctimas y sus familiares participen en todo el proceso del sistema justicia criminal. DOJ está forzando y excluyendo a los estados que no están colaborando con el gobierno

federal; en empeñar las ejecuciones emigratoria contra personas ilegales en el país.

"El gobierno federal está tratando de usar los fondos otorgados a los sobrevivientes para poder negociar como moneda de cambio, forzando a los estados en hacer cumplir leyes inmigratorias," dijo la Fiscal General James. "Estos servicios fueron creados para ayudar a sobrevivientes, al alivio y recuperación, nosotros vamos a pelear asegurándonos de que ellos continúen en sirviendo ese propósito. Los residentes de NY merecen un sistema de justicia que ponga su seguridad primero. No seremos intimidados a abandonar a ninguno de nuestros residentes".

Según el reporte, bajo los nuevos requisitos inmigratorios de parte del DOJ, la orden VOCA será recortada a cualquier estado que se niegue darle a la Oficina de Inmigración y Aduanas ICE entradas sin restricción a instalaciones, que no proporcione información, fechas de liberación y/o respetar todas las peticiones civiles inmigratorias.

La Fiscal General, resaltó que estos requisitos están directamente en conflicto con las pólizas de su estado. De la misma manera, otros estados están garantizando la seguridad de víctimas y testigos para que puedan reportar crímenes sin temor

a ser deportados.

El Congreso público promulgó la ley VOCA alrededor de 40 años atrás, dirigiéndose al abandono de los sobrevivientes de crímenes, y financiando programas de asistencia. Estos fondos federales fueron otorgadas estrictamente para respaldar programas de compensación y asistencia directa a sobrevivientes, incluyendo servicios de apoyo a casos de crisis emocionales, emergencias médicas, exámenes forenses en asaltos sexuales, gastos funerales y servicios en sepelios, además ayuda en albergues de emergencias.

La fiscal James argumenta que VOCA sigue siendo un programa crucial, suministrando tratamiento a víctimas de crímenes serios, dándoles ayuda en sus recuperación. Estos servicios son necesarios después de los traumas psicológicos después de sufrir actos criminales.

Los estados anualmente se benefician al ayudar a aproximadamente 10 millones de víctimas cada año. En el 2025, casi \$1,4 billones de dólares estuvieron disponible para todos los estados. DOJ está tratando fuertemente atacar a los estados para que abandonen estos contratos, manipulado fondos críticos para las sobrevivientes y violando los principios de la constitución.

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Fiscalía contra la Corte Suprema; pena capital inconstitucional en Alabama

Por Marco Serna
Spanish Journalism
Guild Writer

El Fiscal General de Alabama Steve Marshall, expresó en una conferencia de prensa, que el Estado está preparado para desafiar el fallo de la Corte Suprema quien declara la pena capital como "inconstitucional". De acuerdo a un artículo publicado por *The Alabama Reflector* escrito por Brian Lyman.

Según el artículo, el autor describe que crímenes horrendos conducen a crear leyes más duras para asegurar que esos crímenes no vuelvan a ocurrir. Sin embargo la Corte Suprema en 2008 declaró la pena de muerte "inconstitucional", para crímenes que no resulte en la muerte de la o las víctimas.

En el artículo Lyman da un ejemplo; como ocurrió en 2018, después de una falla en el Sistema de Justicia Criminal en Alabama, la cual condujo a la liberación errónea de un individuo, el cual más adelante asesino a tres personas, incluyendo a un niño de siete años, durante una serie de robos en Guntersville, Al.

El Gob. Kay Ivey y el Fiscal General Marshall, hizo un llamado para cambios drásticos al sistema de libertad condicional. Enseguida, los empleados de la Junta de Libertad Condicional JLC e Indultos, era mayormente personas en duda hacia los prisioneros. Como resultado, el número de reos en libertad condicional cayó.

También añade, que la JLC produjo docenas de crueles y ridículas decisiones, como

negarle la libertad condicional a un reo paralítico. Sin embargo estos mismos miembros se están volviendo más flexibles en sus decisiones.

El republicano Matt Simpson y la Rep. Daphne, ex fiscal en casos de abuso sexual a niños, reintrodujo una propuesta de ley presentada el año pasado, que impondría la pena de muerte a aquellos convictos de asalto sexual a niños menores de 12 años. Según Simpson y sus seguidores quienes apoyan la propuesta, describen esos delitos de abuso sexual como una atrocidad.

En el condado Bibb, Al., las autoridades presentaron cargos a siete personas acusadas de operar una red de tráfico sexual de menores, incluyendo víctimas de entre tres a 15 años.

Simpson y sus seguidores quieren anular la decisión de la Corte Suprema en el caso de Kennedy vs Luisiana, donde se prohibió la pena capital por violación de niños, en ese caso la corte votó cinco a cuatro, anulando la sentencia de pena de muerte para un hombre convicto por violar brutalmente a su hijastra de ocho años.

Sin embargo, Kennedy advirtió que el perseguir la pena de muerte, significaba que la víctima — en este caso una niña —, aparte del trauma vivido, tendría además que describir su dolorosa experiencia, primero con las fuerzas de ley y después en un juicio público, especialmente cuando la resolución conlleve varios procesos judiciales.

En el artículo Kennedy también mencionó las

preocupaciones de las organizaciones de trabajo social, sobre el abuso de niños muchas veces no reportado, debido al temor de acusar a un miembro de la familia. Imponer la pena de muerte podría hacer aún más difícil el reportar el crimen.

Acorde al artículo, la pena de muerte no es un freno ante el crimen. Alabama aceleró la pena capital en años recientes. En comparación de otros Estados del país, seis personas murieron en la cámara de muerte en Atmore, Al., en 2024.

Alabama cuenta con altos índices de homicidios en la nación, en 2022, más de 700 personas murieron por homicidio, un porcentaje de 14.9 por cada 100,000, el cuarto más alto en el país.

Según Lyman, "Los detalles

son difíciles de procesar, cualquier convicto de estos crímenes deberían estar encerrados y nunca salir de prisión", agregó que entiende el deseo de la población de someter a los culpables de estos horribles actos a los castigos más severos.

El editor expone las siguientes preguntas: ¿Vale la pena exponer a la víctima, a ese trauma otra vez? ¿Vale la pena poner en riesgo, el reportar el abuso a niños? y, poner a víctimas potencialmente en mayor peligro.

"Cualquier convicto de asalto sexual a niños, debería ser encarcelado de por vida. Pero no dejemos que nuestro coraje supere al bienestar de las víctimas. Si lo hacemos, esto podría traer resultados horribles, sin darnos cuenta", concluyó Lyman.

Concientización a la sobredosis en San Quentin

manera de que los adictos se sientan seguro para hablar acerca del problema".

De acuerdo con la Unidad de Lucha Contra las Drogas DEA por sus siglas en inglés, Spice es una droga sintética que induce episodios psicóticos agudos de intensas alucinaciones, severa agitación, pensamientos desorganizados y delirios de paranoia.

La Fiscal de San Francisco Brook Jenkins hizo acto de presencia al evento en apoyo a la comunidad encarcelada, haciendo conciencia de este problema que está devastando vidas, familias y comunidades.

"No estamos en lados opuestos; todo es para crear comunidades seguras, no hay suficiente ayuda a nivel de condado, necesitamos replicar este ambiente [en SQ]", recalcó Jenkins en su discurso.

El fentanilo es un analgésico potente, que los médicos recetan en dosis controladas a personas que sufren mucho dolor, con más frecuencia el fentanilo se agrega a drogas ilegales, por ser un opioide sintético más económico y más fuerte que la heroína. Acorde a la información de Medical Reserve Corp.

Durante el evento el excarcelados Trung Huy, compartió su experiencia detrás de su encarcelamiento, esta experiencia marco su vida y ahora trabaja con la organización de Servicios Asiático Americano en la Recuperación AARS por sus siglas en inglés.

AARS ofrece servicios a la comunidad en general como terapias y consejería individual y familiar, prevención en reincidencias criminales,

terapia cognitiva entre otros servicios, sus servicios también están disponibles en español a pesar de ser una organización asiática.

Personal del Departamento de Salud Pública de Marin impartió procedimientos a los reos sobre la Resucitación Cardiovascular Pulmonar RCP con las manos y el manejo del Desfibrilador Externo Automático AED durante el evento.

De acuerdo a las enfermeras invitadas, existe una tasa alta de muerte por fentanilo, por esta razón SQ provee a los excarcelados Naloxona [nombre comercial Narcan] es un medicamento que revierte una sobredosis de opioides en un aerosol nasal listo para usar y puede restablecer la respiración.

Para enfrentar el alarmante aumento de sobredosis

desde el año pasado, La Directora Médica, Dra. Alison Pachynski de SQ, comentó que se distribuyeron 2400 cajas de Narcan, y agregó que miembros del personal médico junto con residentes han recibido capacitación para el uso adecuado del medicamento.

También los grupos de auto ayuda estuvieron presentes, tales como: Lenguaje de Señas Americanas ASL, Armas Abajo, B.R.A.V.E. El Grupo de Veteranos de SQ, Alcohólicos Anónimo entre otros grupos para ofrecer sus servicios e información para la comunidad de esta institución.

Harriet Siqueiland voluntaria del grupo de Servicio de Reingreso Puentes Familiares "Family Bridges, Inc.", comentó que esta organización provee servicios de vivienda y

servicios comunitarios, entre otros servicios para población encarcelada.

"Tenemos los recursos para empieces tu nueva vida con nosotros, estamos cuando ustedes quieran tomar el primer paso", dijo Siqueiland quien se mostró contenta a ver la respuesta a tantas personas y el interés sobre el problema de la sobredosis.

The Reentry Network Family Bridges, INC Asian American Recovery Service

HealthRIGHT 360
Housing and Community Service servicios disponibles en español (844)-819-9840 510-250-2018 408-271-3900
—Por César Martínez Staff Writer

Cultivating healthy relationships a catalyst to favorable environment

By Jason Jackson
Staff Writer

San Quentin's recent celebration of Mental Health Wellness Week reveals how the prison's cultural shift benefits residents and staff alike.

San Quentin Rehabilitation Center held events through the second week of September to bring awareness to mental health while offering support and positive outlets to residents and staff. Some of the events included a talent show, Cross Fit competition, flag football game and yoga classes.

"I participated in the Cross Fit competition because I wanted to challenge myself and to motivate my peers to get out of their comfort zone," said Marcus Tobin, a San Quentin resident incarcerated for seven years.

The common theme throughout the week was the collaborative effort between those incarcerated and those employed at San Quentin.

As San Quentin moves forward with its adoption of the California Model, there is growing focus on improving relationships between incarcerated residents and staff. This was on full display during Mental Health Wellness Week with correctional officers' participation in the Cross Fit competition, and Mental Health Recreational Therapist Ms. Gonzales's showcasing her rap skills during the talent show.

In keeping with the spirit of mental health, building healthy relationships can be a catalyst to creating a favorable environment for all parties.

"Interacting with people, especially staff, makes those of us who are locked up feel human, and is a huge part of rehabilitation. It helps to be talked to instead of talked at," said Tyree Huntley, a San Quentin resident incarcerated for nine years.

"Cops are human, too, and so they are taking in a lot of what happens here. That's more reason to make things better and allow us to create better connections," said Huntley.

Marcus Tobin appreciates the environment that San Quentin is striving to create because he's able to be himself and remain focused on his education and success. "It's better to let go of the hard politics that divided cops and inmates, and existed between inmates of all backgrounds," said Tobin.

Creating pleasant and safe environments through positive interactions with incarcerated residents can also be conducive to better mental health for correctional officers, who are known to suffer from various ailments due to work-related stress.

A 2017 research study conducted by the University of California - Berkeley found that 29% of corrections officers reported receiving injuries while on the job, 85% said they've seen someone seriously injured or killed at work, and 50% of officers revealed they feel unsafe on the job. These statistics correlate to high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, and suicide.

"Cops are human, too, and so they are taking in a lot of what happens here. That's more reason to make things better and allow us to create better connections," said Huntley.

Mental Health Wellness Week did more than highlight the need to focus on mental stability. With residents and staff engaging in friendly competition, and staff coming out to show support, San Quentin offered a glimpse of the friendlier environment that's possible when minds are open.



Clockwise from left: Eliazar Guerra performs on expressive night

Guest veteran's team and resident flag football team

Zack Skow and his handicapped dog perform

Expressive arts offer mental health reprieve

By Ben Greenspon
Journalism Guild Writer

Over 200 San Quentin Rehabilitation Center residents packed Chapel B for expressive arts night, one of the many events in efforts to raise awareness during mental health week.

SQRC Mental Health faculty greeted residents as they handed out toothbrushes, beef jerky, stress balls, and sticky labels with positive messages.

Resident and Master of Ceremony Rafael Henok spoke to the audience about the importance of addressing and dealing with mental health issues.

Henok said mental health issues don't just affect residents, it affects Correctional staff as well, and they both face the same problems.

According to UC Berkeley's research 31% of Correctional Officers have contemplated suicide, compared to 3% of the rest of the public. Prison staff has high rates of suicide, depression and substance abuse due to job related stress.

Resident Carlo Huertas arrived at SQRC less than a year ago; this is his first time in prison.

He said that substance abuse and poor mental health led him to make bad decisions, which eventually landed him in prison. He feels very lucky to be at San Quentin because of all the self-help groups and support available.

Huertas has an ambition of the positive influence of his peers, which enable him to keep an open mind.

"I like to be surrounded by positive people and make new friends," Huertas said. "Being here helps me avoid my anxiety and mental problems."

The Bureau of Justice statistics reported that 43% of incarcerated people suffer from mental illness.

In the process of raising awareness about mental health, residents brought musical art forms to the event.

The talent ranged from a variety of performances such as poetry, punk rock, and country.

Resident Stiue Tolvao regularly performs reggae music but today he performed a country song that made everyone in the room hoot and holler.

The rock band 115's, brought the house down with

their original song titled "How much is the cost?"

What does mental illness really cost? According to the National Library of Medicine people with mental illness are twice as likely to be unemployed, 35.1%, compared to 17.1% for adults without mental illness.

The effects of losing a family member while incarcerated can have a devastating impact.

Resident and musician Patrick Piceno said his mother was his "rock" (Biggest supporter), she passed away on December 12, 2024, and her death brought him so much pain he couldn't perform or compose music.

He added that his mental state enabled him to engage in self destructive behavior. Months passed, and then one night Piceno had a dream that unlocked something inside of him.

Piceno wrote his first song titled "Elizabeth in December" about losing his mother, which he performed in her memory.

Piceno had some advice for SQ residents that have lost a loved one during their incarceration.

"The hole in your heart will always be there, try to remember the things about them that make you laugh, and smile," he said.



Photos by Marcus Casillas // SQNews

Patrick Piceno



Alive Inside organization brought in band to perform during Friday's event



Parole Board Commissioners

Clockwise from above:
Medical Office Technician Shirley Barney
teaches a dance to residents

Resident and Captain Anhtien Truong hand off baton in race

Residents perform pull-ups in series of
exercises during event

Tic-Tac-Toe and swag handed out

Lower Yard event full of festivities

By Jarvis Garner Jr.
Journalism Guild Writer

San Quentin Rehabilitation Center held the final day of a weeklong series of mental wellness events, which included BPH commissioners.

On Friday, September 12, the SQRC's Mental Health Delivery System made efforts to bring healthy thoughts to SQ residents with a plethora of events.

In SQ's Education Annex classroom A1 on the lower yard, Parole Board Commissioners Purcel and O'Meara and three parole agents came to share what the parole process looks like.

One of the visitors was a therapist eager to share insight on being found suitable for parole from a mental health perspective.

Purcel, a former attorney, spoke on legal standards and the importance of knowing your rights heading into a suitability hearing.

"It ain't bragging if it's the truth," Purcel said about having consistency and honesty in every evaluation with one's self. She also reminded residents of the power of taking accountability for one's actions.

Commissioner O'Meara, who is also a psychologist, focused on the comprehension and application of rehabilitation, and the importance of understanding how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) impact lifelong mental health outcomes. The prism of ACE markers helps demonstrate how traumatic childhood experiences can be linked to adulthood character defects and health problems.

O'Meara was adamant in encouraging residents to know their ACE contributing factors vs. causal factors. She said it is important for people to understand and speak about what happened in their past.

In classroom C2, Dept. of Corrections Parole Officers and a mental health therapist gave residents CDCR 1515 forms on special conditions of parole, including notices of those conditions.

Head Parole Agent investigator Aspen Marshall, a 17-year military veteran, gave residents perspective on the new-and-approved parole agency.

"Right now in Governor Gavin Newsom's administration, we're big on forward thinking," Marshall said. Marshall went on to say that, parolees must be honest about their programming to get the help they need.

"We're trying to get to a better place than the department was in the past," he stressed. "Yes,

we're trying to be less reactive; we are trying to make change."

As mental health week final day was coming to a close residents returned to the lower yard indulging in a game of trivia with staff.

One particular question seemed to puzzle the younger crowd, who is the hardest working man in show business? Some of the older guys just smiled, because they knew the answer, James Brown the God-Father of Soul.

Despite playing trivial pursuit another aspect of mental health week was live performances.

Music from residents and outside guest relaxed the crowd with soothing melodies from artist such as Hugo-De-La-Lune(a member of outside guests 'Live Inside') as well as SQ resident performer Ronnie Pearley a member of SQ's Band The 115s.

Leaving the festivities residents filtered in to classroom C2 where the vibe was a little more cerebral.

Alex, a formerly incarcerated and self-proclaimed advocate of Enneagram was talking to the class recalling, doing thirteen years in prison, getting out and swearing never to return.

Thirty days later he was back facing a life sentence.

He remembers being lost in the sauce having no idea who he was.

"People didn't know who I was either. They just knew and glorified what I did but Enneagram introduced me to my authentic self", Alex said. "One thing I know I am today is somebody's hope. I want to be that same hope for someone here today".

Wrapping up the Enneagram session Suzanne reminded residents that mental health issues are not by choice but we have a choice to do something about it.

As mental health wellness week was coming to an end and SQ outside guest begin to wrap things up so did the residents.

Both mindful of each other and appreciative of the connections made throughout the week.

From expressive arts night of sharing hope and honoring life to this final day of celebration and education, SQ resident Pablo Urenda didn't won't the day to end.

"I've been in some bad places in my incarceration but SQ is changing the narrative on how people see me, see us. It's truly a blessing to be here, you know, the first step toward rehabilitation is addressing our mental health," Urenda said.

Crossfit event honors seal team lieutenant who sacrificed his life to save team members

By Terrell J. Marshall
Staff Writer

On the morning of September 11, hundreds gathered on the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center's Lower Yard to watch participants compete in a "Modified Murph," CrossFit event as part of Mental Wellness week.

The "Modified Murphy" Cross Fit event was named after Lt. Michael P. Murphy who sacrificed his life on June 28, 2005 to save the lives of his seal team members during the take down of a warlord during "Operation Red Wing".

In a collaboration effort, SQ's Exercise Movement Class, Veterans Group, Medical and Mental Health staff and residents promoted the importance of mental health and fitness while competing in some friendly competition.

"It was fun and challenging," said resident Chris VanOurkerk. "My goal is to interact with people and push myself outside my comfort zone to improve my health."

Not being able to exercise while housed in county jail for thirteen months, VanOurkerk

said it almost broke him mentally. He added that having access to SQ's yard and the ability to participate in events like this help encourage social interaction and fitness.

The CrossFit competition included forty-two participants divided into 14 randomized teams of 3, made up of SQ residents, staff and outside guests.

The relay style event involved the shared responsibility of each team to complete a specific number of repetitions and exercises at five separate stations. The exercises consisted of a 1-mile run, medicine ball squats, push-ups, pull-ups and a final 1-mile run.

The Murphy Run events are regularly held across the United States as a tribute to the heroism of the soldier who paid the ultimate sacrifice for his countryman.

Winning the day's competition after two heats, A. Gomez, 28, G. Madera, 30, and A. Munoz, 30, finished with the time 22.12 were, Second place finishers were L. Sale, 40, C. Dominguez, 28, and O. Galiciajuarez, 25, with a time of 23:55, and coming in third, B. Tomizaki, 24, J. Fajardo, 44, and E. Martinez,

42, finished with a time of 24:13.

Organizers of the event, SQ residents David Richard, Jessy Zetino and Alex Yohn said they work with physical therapists Tianna Meriage and Michele Wilson as SQRC Medical Recreation Aids and EMC instructors for the diabetic and geriatrics fitness program.

The goal of SQ's EMC program is to encourage residents to use physical fitness to help combat the long-term effects of diabetes, mobility issues and over all general health.

Resident instructor Zetino said the program's mission has grown to encourage the entire SQ community to work towards a healthy lifestyle that combines social interaction, physical fitness and learning the importance of nutrition.

"The foods you consume have a direct impact on your physical and mental health," Zetino said. "When you eat healthy, you feel healthy, and you will be more motivated to do daily activities."

Acting as an event line judge, SQ resident Rob Rios, 53, said he is a Type 2 diabetic and one of the first residents to join the EMC program. He said during the last twelve months his A1C level

dropped from 9.2 to 7.1 and his weight lowered from 241 pounds to 215.

Rios enjoys the program because it forces him to get out of his cell and be more social. Since becoming an EMC member, his health has improved and it allowed him to become part of a community that has a lot in common.

Surprised by the number of diabetics who continue to consume sodas and other sugary foods despite their diagnoses, Rios said he has witnessed a transformation by those who have joined the program and then learned about the importance of consuming a proper diet. He said once a month the class teaches nutrition, portion size and proper calorie intake.

"It's cool because the instructors meet you where you're at physically," Rios said. "They really know how to get the best out of you without pushing you too far."

Rios said having events like "Modified Murph" CrossFit competition are important because they promote everything the EMC class stands for, physical fitness, healthy eating habits and building a stronger community.

