

The Razor Wire

“Sharing stories within our community”

The Newsletter of the California Institution for Women

From Your Editors

For this issue, we invited you to express yourself in different ways as a means of creatively transforming your thoughts and emotions into something tangible for you to share with others. The goal is to create bonds that can be solidified by our unique experience and allow ourselves to go beyond the negative and restrictive aspects of our present reality. We thank all who were inspired to share your experience through your art, whether it is a drawing or a poem. It gives us joy to publish your creative thoughts and facilitate community-building.

We also celebrate mother and fathers in this issue through featured articles and an abundance of photos from related events. Happy reading!

Get on The Bus Event

by Aimee Gana

Incarcerated mothers are not just physically separated from their child or children. The dynamics of the relationship also changes, leaving wounds that may take forever to heal, if at all. With that in mind, the Center for Restorative Justice Works (CRJW) has been hosting the Get on The Bus (GOTB) event since 1999, with only the COVID-19 pandemic interrupting it. On Sunday, April 5, participating incarcerated persons (IPs), families, GOTB volunteers, and CIW staff saw how powerful the GOTB event could be, when Visiting was transformed into a big family reunion. IP Jackie Aparicio shared, “I was nervous and excited because I looked forward to being able to hug my children again. Spending those few hours with them was priceless. It was also comforting to know that my sister, who is taking care of my children, didn’t have to spend for the visit because GOTB provided for everything.”

Present were mothers reconnecting with their children and also aunts, stepmothers, and grandmothers who were approved to participate. IP Luz Ramirez said, “This is the first time we participated in this event. We love it and we will do it again next year, as I love seeing my five-year-old nephew Cole Yanez. I get to read to him and play with him.”

This event comes at no cost to families. Those who opted to meet and have breakfast with other families and GOTB volunteers prior to taking the free bus ride to CIW showed up early at a designated rendezvous point. Ten-year-old Samuel Ray, who visited his aunt, said, “The breakfast was delicious! They had super nice people cooking pancakes and bacon right in front of us.” However, GOTB’s services went far beyond breakfast and transportation. Visiting was made over to look more fun and family-friendly. Board games were available for families to use. There were areas devoted to



IP Culbreath with her son King

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- see GOTB on pg. 5—

Featured Staff—Mr. Mumm

by Paige Linville

This month's featured staff is Jonathan Mumm, TV Specialist. You have probably seen Mr. Mumm industriously filming at one of CIW's many events. Or maybe you visited his Media Center to have your picture taken to commemorate a graduation or other special accomplishment. But because of Mr. Mumm's humble attitude, you probably never knew you were in the presence of a man with a lengthy, award winning career in radio, television, and more. In fact, Mr. Mumm's exciting career before prison ranged from Washington D.C to Sacramento and included producer, disc jockey, actor, producer, author, and more. *The Razor Wire* editors sat down for an exclusive interview with Mr. Mumm to learn more.



Five-time Emmy winner Mr. Mumm!

Here is his story behind the story:

Tell us about your career.

As a kid who always loved entertainment, especially the role of radio announcer, my friends and I went to all the radio stations looking for our first big break. Surprisingly, I was offered a chance to work as a disc jockey for a radio station at the young age of 17 years old. This was the beginning of my career. I went on to work for PBS in Washington D.C. Later, I moved back home to take a job as a reporter at a local news station. Then, I tried my hand in the entertainment industry spending five years in Hollywood in a variety of small roles but my big break never materialized so I went to Sacramento to work as a movie reviewer and newscaster. During my time at this job, I was asked to do a feature series exploring California's expansive sites. I got to travel to many places and experience many adventures such as open cockpit flying, hot air balloon rides, white water rafting, ghost town exploration, and more. I was grateful to be able to share the beauty of California with viewers. I also reported from the Academy Awards eight times and got to interview Clint Eastwood and Hillary Swank when they won the Academy Award for Million Dollar Baby. When I retired, I ran a small theatre in Sacramento before eventually deciding to go back to work.

What brought you to prison?

A little known fact...many former broadcasters pursue second careers with CDCR as either Public Information Officers or TV Specialists. I was interested in working as a TV Specialist so I could run my own TV station.

What does the Media Center do?

In addition to filming and photographing events and graduations, the CIW Media Center produces educational and rehabilitative content. We produce original content that is broadcast on the Institutional TV station. This work wouldn't be possible without the efforts of the hardworking Media Center clerks that I have had over the years. The clerks get educated about how to produce content and other fundamental skills like lighting and photography.

What are some memorable moments at CIW?

What stands out is the talent that CIW's population possesses. What I've enjoyed most is when my clerks were able to demonstrate their talent and skills. I also remember the chances I've had to film unique settings and events like the video I produced about the Fire Camps and the first ever Suicide Prevention Week event.

What is your message to the population?

There is so much opportunity here if you want to take it. Those that take advantage of CIW's opportunities find success. When I first started working here, I knew nothing about prison. After being here for a while, I realized everyone's life has a unique trajectory but there is always an opportunity to make things right...to reclaim your place, I think that is great because there is always hope.

To learn more about the content produced by the Media Center and how to access it, look out for a flyer from IAC about the DRP TV and how to watch it in your dayroom.

Featured Residents—Pat Ordway, aka “Mama Turtle”

by Kinzie Noordman

One can't help but notice the flurry of gardening activity happening around our institution lately. Walk by Emmons A or Barneberg B and you'll see the product of several volunteer gardeners who live in these units. So when I sat down to think of who to write about for this edition's featured resident, I knew I had to pick a gardener — someone who uses plants, dirt, rocks, and other natural items to make this place more beautiful and welcoming. That's when Pat Ordway came to my mind. For years, I've seen Pat toiling away in the hard dirt. No matter the weather, or time of year, Pat can be found somewhere outside messing with her plants. One of the things I admire about Pat is that she doesn't just garden in front of her unit, she works just about everywhere, spreading her positive energy and knack for making things beautiful all over the prison.



Pat, “Mama Turtle”

How did you get into gardening?

Originally I was taught by my mom. I've been pulling weeds since I was in diapers. When I came to prison, I decided to start gardening after my husband died. He always loved to watch me work in the garden, so I thought it would be a great way to connect with him.

How is gardening therapeutic for you?

I've worked all over the yard on different areas over the years. In the past, I did the front of Barneberg. I helped make the raised flowerbed by the Chapel and used to garden in front of the CRM and SAP 3. Now I'm focusing on Harrison backyard.

I've seen many people destroying plants when they're searching for bugs. How do you deal with that?

I take it really hard when people purposely trash my gardens. My plants are a part of me, when people aren't considerate and ruin them, it hurts. We spend a lot of time trying to get these plants to grow, so it is really discouraging when people trample them looking for bugs or going to a window or something. Just take a few extra seconds and be a little mindful, that's all I ask.

so

Turn to page 16 to
learn what your
plants need to thrive!

Many of your gardens reference turtles in some way, can you talk about that?

There's a Native American legend that says that the whole world is carried on the back of a giant sea turtle. Calling gardens “Turtle Island” is bringing a little of that legend into those spaces. When people see my gardens I want them to find the support and healing that they need. Just as the World Turtle supports the Earth, I want my gardens to show that I care about others and the world.

Do you have any advice for aspiring gardeners in the population?

The best advice I can give is to encourage people to speak positively to their plants. If you do, they will respond in a positive way. I know it seems a little silly, but plants really can tell if you care for them or not. Also, I'm more than willing to help and give tips or advice to anyone who asks.

At 63 years young, Pat doesn't let her age or her hearing disability get in the way. She has made the best that she can with her circumstances and uses her time and energy to give beauty to others. We should all be inspired by her positive example and strive to cultivate beauty, wherever we might be planted.

Historically, Latham is known to have the prettiest flowerbeds and front yard... however, the way some of these other units have been getting their gardening on, I wouldn't be surprised if that changed. Keep up the great work everyone and thank you for making our temporary home a more beautiful place!

New Wine Church Event

by Monica Diaz

How do you combat negative feelings about being a mother in prison when Mother's Day rolls around? Crystal Gomez, in conjunction with New Wine Church and various other Community Based Organizations, planned and executed a massive Mother's Day event open to the entire CIW population. The event was held in the Circle with a pop up stage for the performances. Some of these performances included the New Wine Worship team, a Christian Rap duo, Richard Andrew, and CIW's own City of Refuge and Reformation Choir and Praise Dance Team. Even with the hot weather, over five hundred residents of CIW came out to celebrate. Various members from New Wine Church shared testimonies about how they came to accept Jesus in their lives and how making these changes improved their familial relationships. One of the most poignant stories shared involved a mother who was an addict and spent time in prison. This mother shared about how drugs and prison impacted her relationship with her sons in a negative way. The testimony culminated in the mother having an opportunity to care for her youngest son (who was an adult at the time) in a moment when he needed her the most. The audience was in tears as they got to witness the love between this family.

As an added treat, all residents who attended the event received a carnation, Mexican style street corn, tortilla chips with an amazing salsa, Flamin' Hot Cheetos, an ice cold beverage, and a sweet treat. All attendees had an opportunity to participate in an event which promoted positivity and community. And maybe for the mothers who were struggling with being away from their children, a moment to be reminded of the beauty of being a mother no matter their physical location.

Mothers are like glue.
Even when you can't see them,
They're still holding the family together.
~ Susan Gale

Mother's Day in Visiting

by Grace Coleman

The overwhelming sight of mothers reuniting with their children filled the air this Mother's Day. As the doors to Visiting unlocked, mothers walked into a room where hugs and tears lasted a little longer than usual. A mother-daughter bond is irreplaceable. For incarcerated women, a mother's warmth cannot be found anywhere else but here—the rooms of visitation. Roses were handed out to mothers as they walked in, and a tea party awaited them. Teas and teacups were set up across table cloths, alongside sweets and savories from Porto's Bakery & Cafe donated by CIW's Inmate Family Council (IFC). Incarcerated Persons Advisory Council (IAC) members sat at the craft table with beaded bracelet making for mothers and daughters. For the first time in a long time, daughters were able to give their mother a rose for Mother's Day, paired with a floral cup of tea and a piece of jewelry to last a lifetime.



Special thanks to Sergeant Drysol, Lieutenant Soto, IAC, and IFC for reuniting mothers with their daughters and changing lives this Mother's Day.





arts and crafts, where children like Samuel brought out their inner artist, painting free hand or coloring pages from a coloring book. Samuel added, “They had fun activities to do instead of just playing on the playground. I even met new friends! I would love to do this again.”

There was a table filled with an assortment of pastries, fruit, crackers, and drinks. There was free lunch for everyone, enough to feed people more than once. Both families and IPs were also able to take a generous amount of free family portraits taken by GOTB volunteers, which was a treat, considering that it costs \$2.00

per photo on regular visiting days. Fun fact – one of the photographers is Sister Theresa Lynch, one of GOTB’s founding volunteers alongside Sister Suzanne Jabro. Sister Theresa also helped start CIW’s Puppy Program. Incidentally, CIW service dogs in training, Gracie and Johnny, showed up with their trainers, IPs Kinzie Noordman and Paige Linville, for a meet and greet.

Another treat was to see Warden Lavelle Parker support the event by hopping from table to table to mingle and joke around with the families.

CRJW Executive Director Liz Rios said they “understand the value of this event. GOTB volunteers and correctional staff are able to visualize both the reunification aspect of it, as well as the ripple effect the separation has had on the families. When we started this, it was just because we wanted incarcerated mothers to see their children. But we realize it is so powerful and we recognize what it brings to the table. The interaction allows us to see the IPs in a different light.”

GOTB’s involvement did not end after the families said their goodbyes. On their way out, the children received a backpack filled with school supplies, a teddy bear, a handwritten letter from the CIW resident they just visited, and memories that last them a lifetime.

This year’s event was different in a good way. In the past, IPs who had any crimes involving minors were not allowed to participate. However, we all know that every case is different. Thanks to the people who brought this to light last year, the criteria was changed. It is not about the crime anymore. As long as the IP is approved for contact visit with minors, they can participate in this annual event.



PREP

by Aimee Gana

If you are a lifer, you may have heard of the Partnership for Re-Entry Program (PREP). Its purpose is to promote personal growth through self-introspection, according to PREP Director Sister Mary Sean Hodges. She brought in her team of PREP Coordinators for an open forum at the Auditorium on May 31.

One of the coordinators said they wanted to interact with CIW residents to hear our stories as they build their courses around language that is familiar to us. It helps to know that four out of five of their staff members are former lifers who have gone home. This is the reason why people who have taken their courses find them relatable. Incarcerated Person Mara Plascencia said, “One of the things I like about PREP is how they provide insight from former lifers’ perspectives...which is really helpful.” Participants of the session left motivated to learn skills that will help them reach their goals when they parole. If you are interested in taking PREP courses, send them a letter sharing your interest to P.O. Box 77850, Los Angeles, CA 90003. Edovo offers PREP courses on our GTL tablets.

Leading with Conviction

by Grace Coleman



Leading with Conviction Panel

Leading with Conviction called women to express themselves through recovery and purpose. Three women sat on stage as the CIW crowd gathered around to hear their revolutionary stories of transformation. From addiction to homelessness, from incarceration to education, from professional licensure to success, Dr. Genevieve Rimer, Kaelyn Doyle, and Sonia Guilfoos shared the series of injustices they have endured, leading them towards their own recovery and purpose in psychology and social work.

Dr. Genevieve Rimer has nearly 20 years of experience in the reentry field and the Founder of the National Association of Formerly Incarcerated Social Workers. She studied at USC as a member of the “Unchained Scholars” program to shine light on formally incarcerated students and utilized the program as an employment network in Los Angeles. While she once struggled with acceptance of being an incarcerated woman, she now owns this label as one of her most prized identities. Without shame or apology, she admitted to the crowd, “There was nothing I could not handle due to my lived experience. The things I hated about myself became my biggest strength... Keep that evidence of rehabilitation... because I see you.” The audience shared their own growing moments of trial and error in becoming who they are today—and who they are still becoming. By watching the change-making women on stage, the audience was able to see a glimpse of their future self.

Kaelyn Doyle is an Associate Clinical Social Worker, and has served as a Project Rebound scholar and President of the San Bernardino Chapter of *All of Us or None*. She encouraged CIW to write their story in order to get to where they want to go in life. She expressed, “School paves the way to open up the doors currently closed.” Doyle boldly believes, “If you put your voice out there, do the writing, they will pay for you to go to school.” Ways to accomplish this? Organizations like Project Rebound support fair chance education, you can also apply for student loans such as mental health loans. After years of struggling and studying with the dangers of substance abuse, Doyle prompted the crowd to think about substance abuse as the “rational root to trauma [and] reoccurring trauma.” People often experience trauma, then fall into the challenges of substance abuse where more trauma is endured. Doyle’s perspective on recovery and education as the stepping stone to success encouraged CIW residents to get a jumpstart with the resources they have in their corner.

Dr. Sonia Guilfoos is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with nearly 25 years of professional and lived experience in the field of social work and mental health. With 13 years of sobriety, she admits, “As addicts, we go from one substance to another... I drink a lot of Coca-Cola and got a little PTSD on the side, but I maintain my sobriety anyway.” Dr. Guilfoos is the CEO of Corazon Amado Healing Center where she provides psychotherapy while specializing in brain spotting. With the launch of her podcast “Con Amor, Your Therapist Friend” she sends a virtual love letter into today’s societies in hopes of spreading mental health awareness.

All three speakers spoke on the importance of people pinpointing their hopes in their ability to express their concerns in regards to mental wellness practices. Everybody’s got something, and it’s every person’s job to find a mental wellness track fit for them. All three representatives encouraged the audience to, “Know your purpose... Know your possibilities... [and] Know your rights.” The women provided the population with an example: “In LA County, if your date of conviction is 7 years old, the background check cannot be considered.” Dr. Guilfoos spoke on owning your potential by striving to, “Be inspired by the work of others [and] let that motivate you to go to therapy and work on your trauma... So you can heal and unlearn [the] stuff you’ve learned – and whatever runs your life.”

Thank you, Leading with Conviction, for a women’s way of leading, with conviction.

You will release the tendency to say sorry.
You will release the pull to compete over building a community.
You will release the disconnect with your body and with trust, and fully realize your abilities.

~ Jessica Hagestedt

Part 1 of Our Mothering in Prison Series—Staying Connected

by Kinzie Noordman

All the ‘mother themed’ events we’ve had lately, and the recent celebration of Mother’s Day got me thinking about what it must be like to be a mother while incarcerated. When I think back on my childhood, I remember all the times my mom was there for me: the handmade Halloween costumes, helping me with math problems, cooking meals every night, or just being there to talk. Even though I didn’t realize it at the time, I now see how important it was for me to have my mom in my life. And I wondered, how my childhood would have been different if my mom had been incarcerated. How do mothers in prison continue to parent their children? What special techniques can they use to overcome the distance and lack of communication that comes with being in prison?

Although I have been a proud ‘dog mom’ a few times, I do not have kids of my own, so I thought it would be best to ask some genuine mothers about how they parent while incarcerated. I randomly spoke with six mothers whose children ranged in age from 4 to 37, and gathered their input on how they parent behind prison walls. For this part, I wanted to discuss the challenges of staying connected to your kids during your incarceration.

By far, the hardest part about parenting from prison is missing out on your children’s lives. It is not just the big milestones like a graduation or first date, but the day to day normal life events that are seemingly unimportant. Watching your children grow up through sporadic visits or monthly video calls can be heartbreaking. Some mothers only get to see their children once or twice a year, some never get to see them at all. So how can you overcome such challenges?

Well, as Tiffany McGuire shares, “one of the most important things is to keep the line of communication open so that your children can always speak to you about anything.” Cultivating a relationship with your children can be one of the best things you can do. Cecilia Ochoa shared that when she communicates with her children, she always asks them to tell her about their day: “How do they feel? What do they do when they encounter different situations? What are they thinking about? What are the things they’re interested in?” It’s also important to talk about deep subjects with your children if they’re ready. Bani Duarte shared, “I use myself as an example of how things could go wrong due to a lack of emotional stability and self-awareness. I tell them that in life people make mistakes but the important thing is to take accountability, learn from them, move forward and don’t repeat them.”

*Stay tuned for our next issue
as we continue our
“Mothering in Prison” series.*

The most important take away: Stay connected, do anything you can to keep in touch. Even if your children are not writing you back or don’t write often, keeping your end of the communication line open is extremely important to show that you care. As Victoria Corrales put it: “Stay in contact with your kids no matter what, whether its through the mail or the phone. Never give up.”

Ways to Stay Connected With Your Kids

- ♦ Writing or sending a card every week. If you can’t contact them, then journal your thoughts to give to your kids later. Even if it is going to be years, you can show that you thought of them the whole time. If you do have contact with your kids, keep a journal of phone calls and events in your child’s life to share with them when they grow up. (Stephanie Lazarus has been doing this for years and is on her 21st journal!)
- ♦ Help them with their school work. If they’re struggling on a certain subject, find out about it and help. (Edovo is a great resource to learn along with them.)
- ♦ Read books together over the phone. (Stephanie Lazarus came up with a great idea to “popcorn read” with her daughter. They take turn reading and say “Popcorn” to switch turns.)
- ♦ Take parenting classes. There are many offered here and through correspondence. Write to PREP or check out the CRM classes.
- ♦ If your kids are old enough, share with them about what you’re learning in self-help classes and groups here. For example, emotional intelligence and healthy communication skills are great skills to teach your children.
- ♦ Create a collective story together. Take turns writing lines or drawing pictures and mail it back and forth.
- ♦ Get a hobbycraft card and make crafts to send home. If you have the means, put together a little care package with candy or granola bars to send home for special events.

Father's Day at Visiting

by Monica Diaz

On June 15, Visiting Staff, Inmate Family Council (IFC), and Incarcerated Persons Advisory Council (IAC), teamed up for a Father's Day event held in Visiting. As the visitors were processed and checked in, each male visitor received a "World's #1 Dad" sticker to wear on their shirt. Each individual also received a ticket to be redeemed for a donut and Starbucks coffee which was donated by the IFC. The day featured an arts and crafts table. J. Drysol, Visiting Sergeant, suggested an apron decorating craft for the day and even provided a sample which she had decorated herself. Visitors were able to sit on the patio with their loved ones and decorate an apron together which the visitor was allowed to take home at the conclusion of the visit. It was fun to watch the families sit together and plan how to decorate the aprons. The IAC passed out snow cones to visitors (also donated by the IFC) and the incarcerated population. A cornhole tournament was held and families got to compete against one another for a prize. Sergeant Drysol, the IFC, and the IAC judged the completed aprons and first and second prizes were awarded. Visiting was filled with laughter as families bonded over the activities, shared treats, and the overall ambience of spending quality time together. Many visitors commented on the positive vibe in Visiting and expressed gratitude to A. Soto, Visiting Lieutenant and Sergeant Drysol for the Father's Day event.



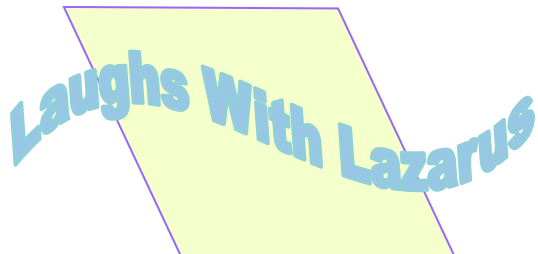
Proud cornhole winners



Winners of the Apron Decorating Contest



Visitors and their families enjoy the Father's Day event at Visiting



Buffalo Jr. said to his dad, "I'm off to college!"
Dad responded: "Bison."



Why was the mermaid so good at math?
- Because she wore an algae bra!

Poetic Justice— Voice, Hope, Power to Change

by Grace Coleman

“Every time I write these words...They become taboo.” *Poetic Justice* by Kendrick Lamar. To kickoff April’s Poetic History Month, the Poetic Justice Crew came in fresh and hot. Poetic Justice truly embodies what it means to express yourself. The non-profit organization offers restorative writing and creative arts programs to those who have been or are currently incarcerated inside women’s prisons across the United States – including California, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Their vision? To live in a world where a person’s voice, worth, and potential are not limited by mass incarceration. The Open Mic. on Saturday, April 6 brought topnotch energy through the Auditorium seats as Poetic Justice participants belted out a chant: “I HAVE A VOICE. I HAVE HOPE. I HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE MY WORLD.” The way they see it, community heals... and the power of unity has the capacity to make change.

The rooms of Poetic Justice carve the way for generational change. Poetic Justice holds two weekly programs inside CIW, and runs the Children’s Literature Workshop where incarcerated mothers write and illustrate a children’s book with their kids. Coming soon, the mommy-and-me program will grant children of incarcerated parents the opportunity to join hands with their mothers upon completion of their soon-to-be published book.

The Open Mic. allowed CIW residents to witness first-hand how writing creates a space where voices are not limited – and often left uncensored. Leader of the Open Mic, Leticia Montoya, encouraged poetic participants to take the stage. She voiced what the work of writing has done for her, along with the humble reminder, “Life will show up in simple ways. Life can change in a blink of an eye.” Writing allows humans to simply be human. In the absence of who everyone wants us to be, we find who we really are.

In a world where we stand against unlawful acts of immigration policy, IP Brandyce Marquez brought the crowd a piece of her truth in digging up the earlier days of her Latina roots. As a child growing up across the border, Brandyce remembered and shared in her poem how her, “Brother tells her to wake up and she can’t... because it’s not a dream.” In a poem on deportation, Brandyce shared with the audience, “What the border means to me... The border to me means free... Freedom to you is different than freedom to me.” As societies continue to persevere through political problems, CIW residents were able to partake in the real-world reality of where our country currently stands in shining light on the stories of our peers within our community.

Highlight of the Slam? Dayajanae Brown’s GEN. Z. The IP and Poetic Justice supporter authentically voiced the struggles of being a part of the newer generations, educating the crowd saying, “I want to be the change the youth needs to see.” Being a Gen. Z, Dayajanae described the youthful growth and cognitive development to be based on, “Four character traits... Facebook, SnapChat, Instagram, and TikTok.” Dayajanae may only be 22 years old; however, through life experiences, embodies the urge to live the change they wish to see in the world and help others to live it too.

Another Gen. Z took the stage to share her take on “Divine Feminism.” Reba Kerwood spread the importance of unity in standing strong, through admitting, “You locked my strength in a box...[but] when we stand together, we get our power back.” Although this was her first poetry slam, she expressed her vulnerability as she reached a newfound freedom. In sharing her honest opinion as a reflection of the hurt she has walked through, she was able to feel empowered by standing strong as a woman owning her life experiences.

Ending the day in an honorary Poetry Slam, the crowd shared their writings written within a 15 minute timespan. Audience members took the stage to share their raps and poems, filling the room with memorable moments and a sense of ease. Tamara Hinkle left a footprint on our hearts with a reminder of the true power of unity, voicing, “We are all one where I’m from. Woman, your spirit breaks generational curses. Woman, you are the change you want to see.” The power of poetry reminds us we are who we choose to be—not who the world labels us as. Poetry allows us to just be. The Poetic Justice Open Mic. and Poetry Slam allowed CIW residents to be just that—along with taking one step closer to the change they wish to see.

I believe Poetic Justice gives us hope. Hope in ourselves, hope in our state, hope for change, hope for society, hope for women to overcome where we have been and what we have been told we are.

~ Poetic Justice Participant

Hope Beyond

by Grace Coleman

Hope Beyond is a parole board prep, pen pal, and reentry organization founded by Jodi and Celia. The women step forward to build community, spiritual walks, and supportive friendships with a team of empowering women. On April 12, they stepped into CIW to close the gap between their Hope Beyond community and the community of CIW. Where did the idea of Hope Beyond come from? The friendly founders attended a spiritual praise and worship service where the pastor prayed for, “Hope beyond the prison walls.” Standing in the crowd side-by-side, Jodi and Celia caught each others’ eye and knew they had found something worth standing for. Hope Beyond was going to become a woman’s foundation to stand on as they took the steps to go to Board and return home.

The women provided insight to people eager for Board of Parole preparation. Jodi respectfully clarified to the crowd, “You can’t have remorse until you have truly changed. Change winds together a web you can’t even make sense of anymore...and forms awareness of how you’ve affected other people.” Although Jodi has never served time in prison, she willingly confessed she should have been when living in her own “personal prisons.” She believes every person is one poor choice away from landing themselves behind bars.

Celia, a former CIW resident, humbly voiced how God prepared her to overcome obstacles to come back into CIW and be who she is today. She admits, “It wasn’t until I could break that cycle and say ‘God doesn’t make junk.’ You never know who you are interacting with because God could turn them into an angel...We walk out these doors today and we are still here.” With the tap of a tablet, the population has grown through the hopefulness and support of Hope Beyond. The women want the population to grow in confidence in regards to going home, and they encourage everyone to reach out for hope beyond the gates.

In preparation for the California Board of Parole, Jodi and Celia broke the overwhelming process into three meaningful steps to hold the key of personal responsibility: [Number one, what kind of person were you? Number two, what have you done to be who you are today? Number three, what would you do today?] Subsections of Hope Beyond’s Board prep packet include a series of in-depth, thought-provoking questions: [When did you realize your family were also the victims? When was the first time you felt empathy? How are you making a positive ripple effect today? Who do you want to be in the world today?]

Contact Hope Beyond to connect with life outside these walls by forming new friendships with women who want to walk you out of your own personal prisons.



The Hope Beyond Team

Business Coaching Day

by Aimee Gana

Looking for free business coaching from entrepreneurs and CEOs? This is just one of the many benefits our community gets by becoming a part of Defy Ventures (DV). DV is a nonprofit organization aiming to shift people’s mindsets from fixed to growth and to give formerly incarcerated people a fair chance in the workforce. Once you’re in a DV class, not only do you receive weekly hours of entrepreneurial college curriculum, but you become an Entrepreneur in Training (EIT) preparing you for reentry.

Business Executives and CEOs walked into the CIW Auditorium on April 23 to spearhead a Business Coaching Day for the benefit of 31 EITs in the DV program. Fifty volunteers showed up and showed out for speed coaching and a dose of motivation for EITs currently pursuing their innovative business ideas. DV Volunteer Program Manager, Bree, gave an overview of what was going to transpire, informing EITs who have transitioned back to society have a 90% chance of gaining employment. EITs brought their resume, business ideations, and personal statements and received valuable feedback throughout the day.

There were two rounds of coaching. The hope is that in the spirit of entrepreneurship, the EITs are able to share their strengths and show they are not defined by the worst moment in their life and carry transferable skills that can be leveraged with requirements of a job in the outside community. Formerly incarcerated at Kern Valley State Prison, Sunny reminds the EITs, “This is not the end... We still have something to provide the world.”

Expressing Ourselves...One Step at a Time

by Grace Coleman

"This is the only place I feel like I belong...I do not have to tell my story for other people to understand. Without saying a word, I am able to feel understood." By taking 12 steps forward, people walk into a place that feels like home instead of a war zone. We walk out of with a gentle reminder: "We are not the worst thing we've ever done." Recovery unites a community of people who share one common ground: sobriety. Although we're all from different walks of life, we find commonalities in the stories and paradigms we used to live by, as we walk our way to freedom through the spiritual principles of honesty, openness, and willingness. In reclaiming everything we've lost, and all loss we've caused, we let go of who we once were and return to a wholeness that requires us to embrace every terrible and wonderful thing about ourselves.

By letting go and letting God, the rooms of recovery invite you into a community of like-minded people, and a space to talk to people who understand. Through the power of unity, others remind us of what we used to be like and what we have to lose today.



Living in recovery, one day at a time.

To anyone who goes back-and-forth with the idea of joining our 12 Step community within CIW, another member in recovery encourages people to, "Seek it out... Then once you're in, you're in." Swarming stigmas may keep us underwater, but by catching the wave one stroke at a time we reach the shore of serenity.

In the absence of rigidity and confinement, members of our community enter rooms where they move through the uncomfortability of their own fear. In creating connections with others, we lessen the need to escape from all things driving discomfort and start adding solutions there.

Bridging the gaps from the outside looking in, H&I (Hospitals and Institutions) volunteers come into CIW meetings to support life inside. Through their experience and strength, they carry hope into our lives. There is something special about working the steps with members of the

community that has ignited a new era of recovery. There is freedom within the fellowship; therefore, a newfound freedom lies within each of us.

As a twentysomething in recovery, a wise member says, "There is no magic in the process – just willingness." When initially invited into the fellowship, there's a hesitancy to take on a new label while still striving to break free from our own sickness. It is not until taking a step outside of our alcohol-obsessed culture where the purpose in recovery lies. In stepping outside what's socially acceptable, we no longer identify our own self-worth with what is going on in society at large. With the absence of FOMO and freedom from substance-induced prisons, we find a way out of the social justice issues of sobriety within the Prison Industrial Complex by carving out a new path — one step at a time.

It's as simple as this: "How free do you want to be?" Women cling to the ropes of recovery admitting, "I am doing this for my kids." Women are able to voice their own experiences by responding, "When I put my sobriety in someone else's hands, I put my own sobriety in jeopardy." When you realize you aren't the dirty person you thought you were, soul-crushing guilt and resentment are replaced with miracles and a new mindset: Happy, joyous, and free.

Juneteenth Meal

by Kinzie Noordman

When we were told that we could bring up to three Tupperware dishes to the chow hall to bring out dinner for Juneteenth, I thought, "yeah right, there's no way we'll need three bowls." But I was wrong. In celebration of Juneteenth, culinary put together a bountiful dinner that filled three bowls, including chicken and waffles, fresh strawberries, Potatoes au Gratin, jambalaya, and a barbecued meat sandwich. Desert was an ice cream sandwich, which was a pleasant treat. IP Kier Anderson said, "It was the best chow hall food I've had in almost 20 years of incarceration." Although the wait was pretty long, it was well worth it. Thank you to all the culinary staff who made this meal possible!



5K Run to Rebuild

by Aimee Gana

It is not very often that the population at CIW gets an opportunity to give back to the outside community. Therefore, when the Education Department, led by Principal Gayla Brown, put together a 5K Event to raise money for families who were impacted by the devastating Eaton fires, our community responded with enthusiasm. Over 85 resident donors arrived at the Recreation Field on April 10, and were welcomed by Education staff who were posted at the entrance for check-in and to hand us a bottle of Gatorade.

The turnout was successful, considering that for most incarcerated persons (IPs), \$20 is a huge sacrifice, as this could be equivalent to one or two months' pay. At the Opening Ceremony, Chief Deputy Warden (CDW) Sonia Padilla made a fitting observation, stating that an act like this speaks volumes about how we care about the outside community and those that lost their homes. She also told the IPs that she was excited for "the passion you've shown to come and run a 5K, and for the reason why you're doing it...Your hearts are just full."

CDW Padilla presented a check for \$2,150 to representatives from the Brotherhood Crusade—Director of People and Culture Simona Brown and Angeleno Service League Lisa Laster—who expressed their heartfelt appreciation for the donation. Brotherhood Crusade, a trauma-informed youth enrichment organization, launched the Brotherhood Crusade Wildfire Relief Fund together with other organizations, to assist residents and business owners whose properties were destroyed in the Eaton fires. Funds will directly support wildfire relief and recovery efforts with food, transportation, clean water, medicine, and emergency shelter to affected individuals and businesses.



IPs run to raise funds for Eaton fire

At the ceremony, Recreation Coach Aaron Moore talked about how he came up with this idea of putting the event together while sharing that one of his kids is a firefighter. Afterwards, Physical Fitness Trainers (PFT) under the supervision of PFT Coach Monique Nolan kicked off the 10-lap walk/run around the track with a 5-minute stretching exercise. Walking with the population and outside guests, including representatives from the Office of Correctional Education (OCE) at the Headquarters in Sacramento, allowed us to share what the day meant. To most of the IPs, it is much more than just a walk and a monetary donation. This event allowed us to extend our compassion to a larger community, which has great significance, considering there are IPs who feel worthless after being away from society for so long. Indeed, those who are lost in the shadows of their shame and guilt for past crimes showed up and gave back. IP Misti Mangone, who kept seeing the devastation on TV, said she wished she was out in the community as there are "so many things I would want to do to try to give back, like take people water or blankets, or anything...I have such empathy in my heart today."

As we take accountability for our crimes, we can transform our lives by giving back to the world. IP Stephanie Lazarus hopes we can have more fundraisers like these in the future because it creates an "opportunity for us to make living amends and is a great cause." She and others were so happy to be a part of it. Physical Education and Rec Coach Heidi Wippel from OCE echoed our sentiments by adding that, "We must never forget the impact of those who are currently incarcerated and their footprint in the communities through lessons learned. It is the ability to empathize with those less fortunate that brings out the human in all of us."

All participants received water bottles, wristbands, treats on their way out, and the realization that being in prison is not the end of our story. Our souls were fed as we walked out of the Recreation Field knowing we still have something to offer our larger community, and we can still make an impact despite our current circumstances. It is just so powerful to be able to give back.



Staff and IPs run together



Coach Wippel and Coach Moore

Meeting My Childhood Idol—Billie Jean King

by Stephanie Lazarus

First things first, did you ever think you would meet your childhood idol? And second, did you ever think you would meet your childhood idol in prison? Well, rumor had it Billie Jean King was giving a lecture April 2 at CIW, and I just knew I had to make my way there. Why? I started playing tennis in the 7th grade in 1971. My first wooden tennis racket was endorsed by none other than Billie Jean King: my favorite childhood tennis player. At the time, I played on the boys tennis team because there was no girls team. Many of you reading this were not born in the 1970s, so let me tell you a little bit about Billie Jean King.

On September 20, 1973 I was 13 years old as I watched 29-year-old Billie Jean King on television squaring off against 55-year-old former male Wimbledon champion Bobbie Riggs. The prize was \$100,000, winner-take-all intergender exhibition match at the Houston Astrodome. The tennis match was billed as the “Battle of the Sexes,” and I will never forget my mother rubbing her win into my father’s face after Billie beat Bobbie in three straight sets: 6-4, 6-3, and 6-3.

I sought out Dr. Anne Larson, a Cal. State LA Professor who teaches here at CIW, who was hosting Billie Jean King in her Activating Personal Wellness course inside. After tracking her down, she kindly agreed to having me sit in on the Zoom Meeting with my favorite childhood all-star. On the day of the event, we all sat anxiously awaiting for the Zoom Meeting to start. While the meeting ended up lasting an hour, it felt like five minutes. Now in her early 80s, Billie was thrilled to answer any questions from the class, but she was also very interested to find out what it is like to be in prison.

Billie told us the story of how she started playing tennis in the 5th grade at her friend Susan Williams’ country club. She said, “I knew I wanted to be the #1 player in the world.” When asked about her fondest memory besides beating Bobbie in the Astrodome, she said, “My parents coming to watch me was so special, because usually they did not watch me.” Billie wanted to beat Bobbie for a purpose much larger than herself: social change. At the time of her famous match, there were no sports teams for girls in school. Starting in 1975, due to Educational Amendment Title IX, girls were finally able to play sports in school on a girls team. Following her famous win, she says women told her they had more self-confidence, and men told her they were more reflective in thinking more about their wives and daughters. Billie told our group, “The more you talk about history and the more you know about yourself, the more you can change the future.”

Billie attended Cal. State LA in the early 60s and left college without completing her bachelor’s degree to play professional tennis full-time. This past spring 2025 semester, she committed to returning to Cal. State LA to finish her degree. Dr. Larson is currently working with her to complete her coursework. Upon her completion of the curriculum, the two decided she would speak with Dr. Larson’s CIW class due to her story of resilience, commitment to social justice, belief in the power of education, and ability to inspire others.

This moment with Billie Jean King was a dream come true. With wisdom and insight, she left a footprint in the hearts of Cal. State LA students. I did not even get to mention Billie’s world famous athlete of a brother, so stay tuned for more in the next issue of *The Razor Wire*.

Pocket Panty

by Paige Linville

On June 17, an inspirational team of young, motivated women dedicated their time to educating incarcerated mothers about a topic that doesn’t normally get discussed: starting your period. The Pocket Panty is a product developed by entrepreneur Ashlee L. Turner, and it was featured on *Shark Tank*. The team identified the need for women to have a spare pair of panties for many reasons and marketed an individually wrapped panty. After their success, these amazing ladies felt called to be of service. Due to their product, they noticed a need for better education and less stigma surrounding menstruation. The workshop at CIW is their first event geared towards helping moms and daughters get educated about puberty, periods, health, and other typically taboo topics. In addition to the Pocket Panty team, representatives from the Moganite Writing Company, a woman-led strategic storytelling and research firm, and Monica, an Adult Health Educator with Planned Parenthood, assisted with facilitating difficult conversations about important topics. Attendees were encouraged to speak openly about their personal experiences and to identify the support they need to have the period talk with their daughters. In addition, information about women’s health was shared in a relatable and compassionate way. This event was a reminder that support is available for incarcerated mothers to strengthen their connection with their children even while behind prison walls.



The Pocket Panty Team

In Their Shoes

by Stacey Barker

Pain is not transformed, it is transmitted. With it being a part of life, have you ever considered how yours is transmitted to the world? How your pain impacts the people around you? April is Victim Awareness Month: bringing awareness to the impact we have transmitted through our pain.

On April 12, the “In Their Shoes: Victim Awareness Event,” was held to honor victims and survivors. Bringing awareness to the impact of harm validates the victim-survivor experience. Survivors came to share their story, how they have been impacted, and what their healing has been like. Within this space, the intention was to create safety and trust in the absence of judgment, while encouraging accountability and support for responsible parties to arrive at their own personal insight. The survivors courageously shared their stories with us and were graciously open to answering questions we had for them.

Through the stories of survivors, we learned about the depth of our impact of pain. The harm we caused transmitted a harmful symbolic message saying we mattered and they didn’t. The decision of the crime we committed dehumanized each person involved. By recognizing and validating the impact of harm, we can humanize those we have harmed. Listening to the survivors both impacted us as the person responsible for harm and as the person who has been harmed.

We had an opportunity to share how their stories impacted us and what we are now reflecting in our own life. To close out this reviving and inspiring day, we got to share what we should do going forward to honor those we have harmed. We walked together around the CIW Circle in silence to honor all who have been impacted by harm. After, we were given a placard to write the names of our victims as we continued to walk. Along the sidewalk, we used chalk to create a Sacred Artwalk by writing victims’ names and hopeful messages. We also received self-help information on self-compassion, self-care, and STOP (Stop what you are doing. Take 3 deep breaths. Observe your feelings, body, emotions, and thoughts. Proceed with what you are doing).

Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, once said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space, is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” There is a small space to take a moment to consider the impact your reaction will have. Imagine how much less harm and pain there would be in the world if everyone took the moment in that small space to consider the impact their reaction will have on the people around them. What if we responded with love and grace instead of harm and pain?

W.I.N. at CIW

by Stephanie Lazarus

Women Intentional Now is a fitness program activating YOU to WIN your wellness with intention. Dr. Anne Larson brought the fitness program into CIW on May 14 where women of various ages and athletic abilities participated in a workout circuit training. Tackling each station one by one, residents moved their way across the gym through all eight stations. Two of the stations consisted of kettle bells and workout bands, while at the remaining stations lied workout mats for exercise training. Following Dr. Larson’s stretch session, each group worked out for 30 seconds then made their way to the next station, hustling through the Auditorium. After all eight sessions and a quick water break, the groups exercised through all eight stations again, but this time in one minute increments. The circuit training method was invigorating and provided next-level fitness and wellness education to CIW residents.

Fitness mogul Dr. Larson is a professor at California State University Los Angeles (CSULA) and taught Activating Personal Wellness for CSULA students in CIW this Spring 2025 semester. Through her active work in kinesiology, Dr. Larson’s passion for health and wellness continued to grow after her sport-filled upbringing. She says, “Sports and exercise has always been my way to connect to myself and to others.” She has played sports for as long as she can remember. Dr. Larson obtained her bachelor’s degree from University of Jamestown, master’s degree from the University of South Florida, and Doctor’s Degree in Education from Teacher’s College at Columbia University.

Dr. Larson enjoyed guiding residents through the WIN fitness program and hopes to return soon. If you can make the choice to start focusing on your health and wellness now, you’ll be happy you brought this **WIN** into your self-care life.

Women: support your community.

Intentional: build up your best life.

Now: take immediate action.

El Prado Adult School Graduation 2025

by Grace Coleman

California Institution for Women's El Prado Adult School (EPAS) graduating class of 2025 celebrated life changing milestones by initiating the first step to new beginnings. The graduates' motto? "Education is the power of persistence." The students celebrated obtaining various achievements from GED diplomas to college degrees and Computer Related Technology certifications. In honor of the graduating class persevering through life's circumstances, each of them were celebrated and awarded as they looked back on their road of ups and downs leading them to the seats of success.

Warden Parker kicked off the ceremony with his own personal touch on the students' ability to persevere through adversity. He acknowledged the students' courage to pursue their education and voiced to graduates, "You have chosen to take steps toward healing and growth... It is not easy. The challenges you have faced are chapters in your story, and today you are turning the page." While Warden Parker was in school, he had a pre-algebra teacher who intimidated the majority of the students—including himself. Overtime, the strict supervisor wound up becoming a mentor. Warden Parker believes in the CIW population, as he boldly stated, "You are not powerless. You are not broken... You are defying the odds. You have the power to shape what comes next."

Next taking the stage was Keynote Speaker Dr. Terri Giamarino, the ROP Program Manager for the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. Dr. Giamarino oversees educational grants and supports teachers in correctional facilities across the country. In her keynote speech, she admitted to students, "It took 25 years for me to complete my education... Each of you are a sentiment to the world." The graduating class continued to feel the educator's empowerment and encouragement. Continuing to influence policy in Career Technical Education, she continues to be driven by students' educational paths, as she fulfills her purpose in systematic improvement.

Valedictorian Amanda Johnson graced the audience and fearlessly shared her own personal testimony. As a mother, Amanda felt ashamed of her children knowing their mom dropped out of high school; nonetheless, Amanda continued to strive for academic success. While she admits the beginning stages of pursuing her GED were so difficult she quit, she reminded her fellow graduates, "God gave me another opportunity." In the seats of Mr. Taylor's GED classroom, she found her second chance. She says CIW's EPAS educator Mr. Taylor is the reason she is at the top of her class, for he is the mentor who believed in her in order to get there. Standing proud behind the podium, Amanda left students with an important message of what it takes to be their own best advocate by saying, "Don't ever let anyone make you feel like you can't do it—especially yourself." The students in the crowd had not only received diplomas and certificates on this graduation day, but they were given an extra bit of hope. While many CIW residents were not planning to continue along their road to higher-level education, the graduates left with a new plan to pursue college as well as obtaining their bachelor's degree.

Ms. Cindy Piper is the program coordinator for Feather River College located in Northern California. She traveled down to CIW to present the Feather River graduates their associates degree in sociology. When asking Ms. Piper about the unique process of educating people behind bars, she admitted, "Feather River runs as a correspondence college. While some professors are new to the correspondence process, they are learning alongside the students... I have never had a professor turn down the opportunity to provide education to the incarcerated population." Feather River College has brought college-level success to students across institutions all throughout the state of California, as professors continue to attempt to keep up with technology. Just when students think they are alone in updating technology skillsets, they find community in pursuing their academic career.

Congratulations EPAS class of
2025!



EPAS Class of 2025



Graduates celebrate



Valedictorian Amanda Johnson

What Plants Need to Thrive

by Kinzie Noordman

Plants have four basic needs: Light, Water, Nutrients, and Air. Every plant is different and needs different amounts to satisfy their needs. For example, a desert plant like a succulent can survive with less water but needs full sunlight to be happy, while some tropical plants need lots of water but prefer the shade.

Light: Plant leaves produce energy for the plant by absorbing light from the sun. Every plant has its own energy needs, but sunlight or lack thereof, plays a very important role in plant health.

Water: Overwatering plants can cause just as much damage as not giving enough water. The amount of water you need depends on your soil type, the plant's needs, and the climate. By overwatering you are suffocating and starving your plants because the air and nutrients in the soil are being washed away by too much water. Too much water can also cause mildew or fungus to develop on plants.

Nutrients: The top three nutrients that every plant needs to live are nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. As organic matter decays in the soil, it releases nutrients that the plant can absorb to survive. In order to keep the soil healthy, it is important to introduce organic matter like dead leaves, compost, or bark once or twice a year. Remember: those super clean flower beds might look nice, but you're taking valuable nutrients out of the soil and starving your plants!

Air: The leaves and stems on your plant need plenty of air flow to stay healthy. Adequate air movement around your plant can prevent diseases from developing. If your soil is too compact or over soaked with water, the plant's roots cannot absorb oxygen from the soil and will die.

Source: *Gardening Basics for Dummies* by Steven A. Frowine (Available at the library!)

Want to Learn More?

The Inside Garden Project meets every Wednesday night!

Sign up with a 2016 to the CRM.



Check out some great gardening books at the CIW Library!

Do you know what your plants need?

Resource	Too Much	Not Enough
Sun	Dry or faded flowers, leaves with burnt edges, leaves dried out	Lack of growth, stems are lanky and spindly, plant grows/leans towards the light source
Water	Roots unstable/rot, soil is so soggy it won't support the plant, plant droops and wilts, puddles	Flowers and buds falling off, leaves shrivel, plant droops
Food	Too much of any one nutrient will cause specific symptoms	Wilted leaves, no flowers, spots of leaves or stems
Air	Plant or roots are dried out	Leaves have mildew or are soggy

Earthworms are an excellent garden ally and a sign that your soil is healthy!

Cinco De Mayo

By Leticia Montoya

In a time where the immigrant is ostracized; the California Institution for Women (CIW) and its very own Mexican American Recreational Activity (MARA) group showed their solidarity with the Mexican-American population by hosting their annual Cinco de Mayo event highlighting some of the most elaborate Mexican-American celebratory traditions!

On May 17, resident and Chair of the MARA group Rosalba Contreras welcomed nearly 100 individuals to gather and pay homage to the Battle of Puebla starting with Mexico's National Anthem. Rosalba led with informative facts about Mexico's victory over the French. After much anticipation, the most elaborate folkloric dancing took the stage. Smiles and cheers filled the auditorium as the folkloric dancers twirled in pride in honor of their Mexican roots.

Much to everyone's surprise, the one and only Selena Quintanilla—impersonated by resident Genesis Velazquez—made her debut as she belted Selena's "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom." Selena (a.k.a. Genesis) mesmerized the crowd with her iconic purple pantsuit and signature Tejano moves. Chills came over to some, for Selena is remembered as Mexico's sweetheart. An impersonation of Mexico's Diva Jenni Rivera also joined the fun. The unique sounds of "La Mentada Contestada" filled the air jolting everyone out of their seats.

Residents Sandra Bustos and Raymond Bryson then stole the show with their persuading Cumbia dancing provoking staff sponsor Lynn Haynes to share in the festivities. Soon thereafter, a dance-off took place highlighting different genres similar to Cumbia, Reggaeton, Corridos, and Salsa. Resident Denise Chades won the crowd over with her twist, turns, and hip swaying to the beat!

Followed by a chili-eating competition where nine contestants raced to eat yellow chili peppers filled with extremely hot red salsa! The crowd encouraged contestants as their face turned beet red and sweat began to drip off of their faces. The laughs and cheers made every bite worthwhile for those who agreed to put their intestines through such torture.

Lastly, traditional sweet bread (pan dulce) donated by our Inmate Family Council Members was given to all in attendance as a thank you for celebrating. Everyone shared in the wholesome festivities creating community and cultural awareness for the entire CIW population, which would not be possible without the dedication and encouragement from Warden Parker and the Community Resources team! Gracias!



Members of the MARA Group



Folkloric Dancers

Did you know?

Have you noticed the new lock boxes labeled "Positive Messages for Staff" and wondered what they were all about? The boxes, located outside the CRD, North Education Building, Culinary, IAC Shack, and Library are part of a statewide program to acknowledge staff who have a positive influence inside the prison. Anyone can nominate a staff member for recognition by picking up a form from any IAC member. Our Public Information Officer picks up and reads these forms weekly. Worthy staff will receive a certificate and be considered by headquarters for recognition by the CDCR Secretary. Noticing when people, regardless of the color of their uniform, do the right thing is a way to create a positive, rehabilitative culture at CIW. If we reframe our perception and focus on good deeds, we will notice that even in prison, compassionate acts happen every day. Training ourselves to look for and notice the positive moments is a way to improve happiness and life satisfaction. For a new challenge, try to catch someone doing something good and take a moment to acknowledge them.

Voluntary Deportation

by Aimee Gana

ICE raids are the most talked about news in Southern California these days. We see Homeland Security swooping down on business establishments, churches, and even private homes to arrest and detain people merely suspected of being in the U.S. illegally. It does not matter to the arresting agents if one produces supporting documentation or not. If you fit a profile, you are at risk—regardless if you’ve committed a crime.

In the past, threats of deportation upon parole were an added cause for concern among incarcerated persons (IPs) who have ICE holds. This, on top of housing concerns, employment, rebuilding relationships and judgment. Today, it is not just a threat. It is real. Government officials now notify prison parolees with ICE holds, “You’re going to get deported.”

President Trump repeatedly claims that people who are in the U.S. illegally are a burden to the American taxpayers. With this came the daunting launch of Project Homecoming, a proclamation he signed on May 9, providing non-U.S. citizens a chance to self-deport. Project Homecoming presents illegal aliens with a choice: leave the United States voluntarily or face the consequences. Not once has the Trump Administration addressed current undocumented prisoners, leaving a gray area subject to one’s interpretation. Is voluntary deportation an option for IPs currently serving their prison sentences?

The intersectionality between citizenship and incarceration prompts a question: why is taxpayer’s money spent on undocumented prisoners? This question holds the capacity to be erased by the rhetoric that those in prison have already been convicted of a crime, and have to serve their sentences in full before deportation can happen. IPs have long questioned, why prolong the inevitable when IPs’ prolonged prison stays are a burden to taxpayers? It seems as though money trumps again, leaving California taxpayers \$134,000 per year for every IP housed in prison.

Deportation is not for everyone though, as each case is different. Some of those who have ICE holds may opt to fight to stay in the U.S. upon parole, and that is their prerogative. Some do not want to be deported because they have been away from their country of origin for a long time that they don’t have resources or support they would need to start their lives over again, while others feel they would be persecuted and shamed for their crime.

But what about non-U.S. citizen IPs whose only viable option for release is deportation? Shouldn’t they be given an option to self-deport? Take for example the case of Nora Bonnaudet, a 68-year-old Filipino citizen who was sentenced to Life Without Parole in 2001. Nora, who entered the US legally, was born and raised in the Philippines. Her visa expired after she was imprisoned. Nora still has family ties in her native country. She wrote both President Trump and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, asking to self-deport. She has not heard back but remains hopeful she will be deported.

Korina Sanchez is an immigrant with an 80-year-to-life sentence. Prior to her prison term, she fought to do her time in Mexico, but she shares she doesn’t qualify because she has to be six months to the gate. With her life sentence. she will not get to die in her own country. If Korina gets deported, she can have visits with her entire family who lives in Mexico.

Lisa Tseng has been a U.S. citizen for more than 20 years prior to her incarceration, but because she was born in China, an ICE hold was placed on her file. Lisa said that with President Trump’s anti-immigrant sentiment, she would be happy to be deported back to her birth country if she had a choice between deportation or completing her life sentence. She admits it would make more sense for her to be deported, for it costs more money to house her here as a prisoner for life.

I moved to California from the Philippines when I was already in my late 30s. As a non-U.S. citizen, I have to prepare two sets of parole plans to submit to the Board of Parole Hearings – one for California, and one for the Philippines. During these 14 plus years of incarceration, I kept ties with family and friends in my native country, and they are part of my support system. Allowing me to take the option of self-deportation would strengthen my ties with them. So, you may ask, how else can California benefit from deporting people like me, apart from the monetary benefit? For one, we are taking rehabilitative spots that could have been given to incarcerated citizens. Another IP could be taking the Chaffey College course instead of me. My spot with the CalState LA bachelor’s program could be assigned to someone else. I took a seat that could have been given to someone else in The Last Mile’s Computer Coding and Audio Visual Program, two of the most highly sought programs. Do taxpayers really want to keep paying for someone from another country to take these opportunities?

I thank California for footing the bill that went towards my rehabilitation, but why am I entitled to all these? Why is it okay for a non-U.S. citizen to take from a citizen’s opportunity? Apparently, the U.S. Constitution applies to everyone in U.S. soil. This prison I am in is in U.S. soil, and therefore I must be protected. The only way that protection ceases to exist is if I am no longer in a U.S. prison. Following that argument, deporting prisoners will be advantageous to U.S. citizens because people like me are taking from people who are supposed to be protected by the U.S. Constitution.

A.B. 2624—Enacted 2025

Cal Pen Code 2710. Relief from prison employment and education programs for incarcerated persons after death of immediate family member

(a)(1) An incarcerated person imprisoned in a state prison shall be allowed relief from prison employment after the death of an immediate family member of the incarcerated person. (2) If the incarcerated person is enrolled in an education program instead of, or in addition to, being employed, the incarcerated person shall additionally be allowed relief from the educational program. (3) The incarcerated person shall request relief from the warden or their designee. (4) The incarcerated person shall provide substantiation to support the request. (5) Upon receiving the request and substantiation, the warden shall approve or deny the relief as soon as practicable. (b) The incarcerated person shall be paid their regular compensation for the hours and days the individual is scheduled to work during the period of relief. (c) The relief shall not exceed three days for any one occurrence. (d) To the extent resources are available, the incarcerated person shall have access to a mental health professional during their period of relief.

...

For the full text, check out the Law Library on your tablet.

S.B. 337, as introduced, Menjivar. Prisons: sexual assault

Existing law requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to ensure that specified procedures are performed in the investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse incidents, including, among others, that an employee must be terminated if an investigation confirms that the employee sexually abused an inmate. Existing law requires administrators to report criminal sexual abuse by staff and law enforcement authorities.

This bill would state the intent of the Legislator to enact legislation to address sexual assault against incarcerated persons in prison.

This bill has a high chance to pass next stage. It already passed the 1st Committee and 1st Chamber.

Want us to talk about a specific bill, law or legal issue?

**Send your request to The Razor Wire @
Room 23, North Education Building**

Warden's Oath Taking

by Paige Linville

On Monday, April 14, Lavelle Parker traveled to Sacramento to take an oath to be sworn in by CDCR Secretary, Jeff Macomber, as CIW's permanent Warden. The ceremony was the culmination of a long and arduous confirmation process. In a first ever, groundbreaking event, the population was able to remotely attend the ceremony live streamed in the Auditorium. Attendees were able to enjoy popcorn as they witnessed a historic moment. The extra effort to include the population demonstrates Warden Parker's dedication to listen to the people who live here and create an environment of inclusion within the prison.

Congratulations to Warden Parker as we express our gratitude to you for humanizing and lifting up the population.



UCLA Creative Writing Class

The UCLA Creative Writing Class fits like an ugly handmade sweater. Raw and real. We might not always want to wear it. Sometimes it pokes and scratches where we wish it wouldn't. But the sweater knows us, knows our flesh. Each thread has us in mind. Writing our truths is hard. It is thoughtful, it is a catalyst for revolutionizing our being on the page. But like a tiny shameful seedling, beaten and helpless and destined to fall in the confinement of the prison, we have found our way between the littlest crevices of concrete, through the solid cinder blocks of darkness and chains. In our writing we have crawled through the pain, growing softer with each poem. Blooming into happiness of self-love, hope and transformation, in these poems we are freeing ourselves.

If you want a space where you can express yourself freely and be heard, this is the class for you. We meet with outside facilitators Rosie and Asia on Thursdays, 5:30 pm at the CRM.

SUBMISSIONS



UCLA Creative Writing
Class Participants'
Submissions

I'm Not Creative

by Stacy Walker

On behalf of everyone who ever laughed when you tried to draw, those who told you that you couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, whoever it was who said you had no rhythm, the somebodies who said to stop writing, stop acting, stop playing, stop learning, stop dreaming – I am so, so sorry. They were so, so wrong.

I can make people out of paper and ink and the spaces between. I can take a piece of string and turn it into comfort, and warmth, and love. I can take a melody I've heard a hundred times and speak my own story through the lyrics. I can make things.

I've destroyed plenty along the road I took to get here. Creating reminds me that I'm not just some tornado, some Godzilla, some typhoon. I'm a human, wholly and completely, and yes I can tear down and yes I can ruin but — but! — I can also build.

I can take my frustrations/hurt/rage/fear/heartache/worry/regret and I can find a place for it, a vessel, a medium for all the unspoken shadows floating around in my heart and my head And here's the secret: it doesn't have to be good. Sometimes it's even better when it's not – when it's messy and trying, that's when it's the most lovable. So long as it's yours. So long as it's you, on the page, through the song, in the stitch. So you're a mess. You're trying.

So sing. I don't care if it's under your breath. Sketch something — just doodle in the margins. Write, sew, paint, dance, crochet, braid, play. "I'm not creative," is the biggest lie they ever sold you.

Temporary Place

by Mindy Jones

When hope begins to slide
From my heart into my head
I become convinced I'll die here
And my toes clench tight with dread

The weather seems in agreement
No sun to warm my will
My vision of ultimate freedom
Blocked by pessimism hill

So I throw myself a party
Wallow in pity, tears and gloom

Then Kasee sends me LOVE
And my spirits start to bloom

Dark clouds reluctantly part
I paste a smile on my face
Refusing to give more power
To this temporary place

Time to pull up big girl panties
Drag my chin back off the grass
A reminder to keep on pushing
A much needed kick in the ass!

SUBMISSIONS

Kruise Kontrol

by Dayajanae Brown

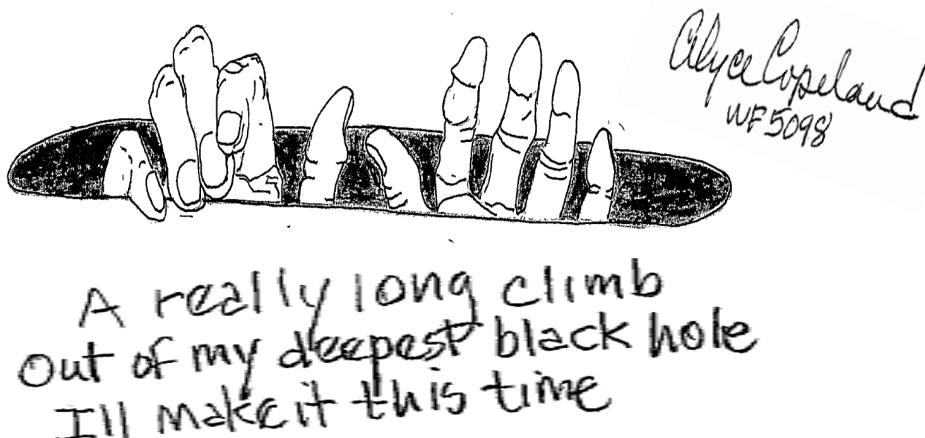
Closed off, reserved, taking the time
To learn my true self, holding my head to the ceiling
Despite the feelings of defeat... The battle of me vs. me.
Sometimes I want to retreat, but I got too much to lose
I was living a fast life, but now I'm on cruise
Tryna control my temptations to act a fool
Temperature on cool, but I'm a hothead
I'm just a master at hiding emotions, don't know how to
express them
So I turned into a poet.
Popular loner, so I'm noticeably unnoticed
Just going through the motions, tryna stay focused
Some days are harder than others
At times I be wanting to cry, but I make jokes instead
Just so I won't blow my cover.
My pain runs deep inside me, like the blood in my veins
It pours out like an open wound
When I'm alone...
My heart and my mind are in tune, but my body gets
misconstrued
So I do things I know I ain't supposed to.
Why can't I accept love? Idk.
Your actions got me questioning your intentions.
Now I'm sittin' in my cell, creating a vision and you ain't in it
Told 'em I'm gon' be somebody, but they ain't listenin'
My mistakes have turned into my mission for change
Something great, learning a lot at this young age
Anger is an invisible baggage, so I'm creating a habit to
forgive
Picturin' life as a passage
Where I walk straight and receive God's love
To keep my path clear.

Native American Expression

by Rosie Azbill

Native Americans occupied much of the land in North America long before the United States ever raised its flag. Native American communities are largely misunderstood. Raising cultural awareness illuminates community and respect, while eliminating stereotypes and ethical and racial division. Native Americans are not a "monolith." Not everyone within Native American culture are the same. With differences in tradition, dress, language, and beliefs, there stands individuality within the groups' general way of life. Native American is a broadly encompassing term including nearly 600 federally recognized Native tribes residing in America — along with many more unrecognized tribes. There are conservatively 600 different dialects, traditions, music and arts, economy, religious and spiritual beliefs, educational systems, family and social dynamics, and so on. Similar to the way you cannot take all of the white Americans in America and shoe horn them into an all-inclusive category, it would be a disservice to do the same to Native people. Regalia is not a "costume." Native tribes each have their own form of regalia, consisting of sacred clothing, accessories, and artifacts worn and treasured. The colors and stitching are deep in symbolism, and the entire process of hand-making of regalia is highly significant in itself. Native people wear regalia to pow-wows, ceremonies, and other traditional dances. We share our stories with others...Putting on our regalia is meaningful and signifies a moment of great pride. It is a form of self-expression. It is not to be taken lightly.

Aho
Ma'ta'ke'ah'se
To all my relations.



**California Institution
for Women**

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W

ould you be interested in writing for *The Razor Wire*? Can you meet a tight deadline? Are you flexible? Can you work with no pay? Can you work under pressure? Are you open to feedback and editing? Are you a team player? If you answered yes to these questions, let us know. *The Razor Wire* is looking for people to cover events for future issues.

We also welcome submissions, including poems, personal experience articles, essays, or artwork. We reserve the right to edit them for length, 300 word max, and content. We may omit submissions that do not align with our Mission Statement.

MISSION STATEMENT

We endeavor to create community by sharing stories, knowledge, and awareness.

We use storytelling to empower each other and propel our community beyond the razor wire.

Catholic Community: Expression of Welcome

By Aimee Gana

At the beginning of every Catholic Service, Father Ibe always asks if there's anybody new. Any newcomer then raises their hand and proceeds to say their first name for everyone to hear. After which, regular attendees, in unison, would say, "Welcome!" This would be followed by a song that speaks of seeing the glory of the Lord in that new person. The whole ritual may sound mundane to some. But for those who are struggling to be a part of a bigger and more compassionate community, or are simply looking for some solace in this "sometimes crazy" prison environment, the word welcome means so much more. It is some form of acceptance for those who may be unable to grasp a deeper concept of love due to past and present trauma. It is the kind one can equate with the basic nature of a warm embrace that whispers everything is going to be okay. I should know, because it is how I felt the first time I attended Catholic Service in prison.

Father Ibe assures everyone in the crowd they are welcome to be a part of the Catholic community. Those who hurt, grieve, mourn, are bored, angry at the world, in trouble, or are just plain curious about what Catholicism is about. It does not matter whether you identify as Catholic or not, or whether you attend other church services from other denominations, you are welcome in the Sunday morning Catholic service.

You also have the opportunity to appreciate volunteers who come religiously (no pun intended) to mingle with the community before and after Mass—Barbara, Jane, and Lanelle. They understand the feeling of where our struggles and sources of happiness are. Barbara and Jane never fail to share how they have been volunteering their time with our community for decades now, and they will never forget the first time they stepped inside to attend a Catholic Service. They say they feel more welcome at Catholic Mass in CIW's Chapel than they feel when they attend Catholic Services in the outside community. This is the reason they continue to make the commitment to spend their Sunday mornings here.

Week after week, attendees show up to hear God's Word through Father Ibe. He may be relatively new to CIW; however, he has worked in Chuckawalla Valley State Prison prior to transferring to CIW—which explains why his sermons are always on point. The first thing he noticed is about incarcerated persons here at CIW is how open people are to attending programs. He is disappointed when the institution goes on a mandatory institutional lockdown and do not get the opportunity to go to church. He wants to continue to be supportive of our spiritual and transformational journey. To do this, he immediately set up First Communion, Baptism, and Confirmation classes and made them available to our community. He also teaches Bible, Moral, and Religious Studies. If you are interested in attending any of the classes, please see flyers posted in each housing unit for the schedule.

The Catholic Community gathers for Mass at the Chapel every Sunday at 8:30am.

**Do you know
someone who we
should interview as a
Feature Resident or
Staff?**

**Write to *The Razor
Wire* and tell us why!**