

The Razor Wire

“Sharing stories within our community”

The Newsletter of the California Institution for Women

From Your Editors

Step back and view life from a different perspective. For this fall season’s issue, we focused on what it would look like if we viewed the world around us from someone else’s eyes. Being incarcerated allows us to have a different perspective from most. The community we share with one another allows us to come together and unite as one.

By taking a step back and seeing things from another person’s eyes, we can become better people than we were yesterday while building empathy in the process. Today, we are not the people we were when we walked in. There is power in storytelling and allowing people to take a walk in another person’s shoes.

Storytelling Across the Walls

by Grace Coleman

If people are not prison abolitionists, then what are they? When people hear the term “abolitionist,” they typically think crazy or radical. Active abolitionist April Harris prompts societies to ask themselves this controversial

question. The way she sees it? There are three types of belief systems people adapt to across the world: abolition—the prison system should be abolished; liberation—some people belong in prison; and transformation—people change over time. April had a vision no one else was able to see. Through the courageous act of storytelling, April initiated a deep-seated ripple effect into the hearts of educators and storytelling participants. Oftentimes, people who are incarcerated feel pulled to nod in agreement when it comes to outside matters, masking the massive disconnect to reality incarceration has introduced. On Sunday July 27, research advocates from the UC Sentencing Project (UCSP) sat inside CIW alongside a room full of storytelling IPs, where students sat with the labels they did not consciously choose—a feeling every person knows all too well.

Inside the first-ever Storytelling Workshop, students were met with open arms by

- see STORYTELLING on pg. 5 —

Family and friends outside can now view us online at
womenprisoners.org/the-razor-wire/

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Inside this issue:

Featured Staff	2
Featured Resident	3
TLM’s AVP Cohort	4
LWOP Honors Victims	5
Aud Renovation	6
Mothering in Prison	7
Fear For Breakfast	8
Celebrate Recovery	9
Zepbound	10
Running Club Time For Change	11
Mask On/Mask Off	12
Sound Bath	13
Peer Support	14
Actor’s Gang	15
Defy Ventures	16
Defy Happy Returns Uncuffed Graduation	17
Ella Baker Center	18
Legal Corner	19
Submissions	20
ReEvolution	22

Featured Staff — Mr. Hamilton

by Grace Coleman

For this season's issue on "Perspectives," we decided to feature a staff member who is truly a hidden gem within CIW: Mr. Hamilton. He oversees numerous areas to provide essentials within our community, utilizing his leadership and extraordinary work ethic in order to ensure all operations are running smoothly. While the population does not always agree with the works of supply distribution, Laundry, and even the quality of toilet paper, we wanted the population to gain another perspective from the big boss behind the scenes.

Tell us about the various areas you oversee throughout CIW.

I am the Warehouse Manager within CIW. I cover three warehouses: Annex Warehouse, Support Warehouse, and Maintenance Warehouse. In addition to this, I oversee Laundry and Clothing, as well as the Recycling Program. I ensure all areas are running smoothly so the population and staff have their material needs met. I recently reached my 22nd year working in CIW.

Do you have a favorite memory over the years?

Well, I enjoy coming to work because of the people I work with. I am very much a people person and the privilege to provide as much for people here as I can. I came over to CIW from CIM in 2004, when the camaraderie between people here was great. I stayed because my partners and supervisors allowed me to understand what corrections was about. I left CIM after 5 ½ years as a Correctional Officer. I wanted to return to CDCR in a different role so I applied for a Materials and Store Supervisor II position.

What is your message for the population?

Take advantage of what is offered now! Working with women, I have a much better understanding of corrections and rehabilitation. I try to leave the women with an impression to help them move forward and to never come back. My best advice? Mature here and do not grow up here. When you mature here, you understand why you are here and will not return. On the other hand, when you grow up here, you grew; however, you didn't change much.

You have recently become a helping hand in self-help groups by becoming a self-help sponsor. What inspired you to become a sponsor?

I always told myself I would never do the self-help sponsor thing. I just never saw myself actually doing it. Nevertheless, my background as a CO and watching my own staff become sponsors, they would tell me about it all the time. In talking to them I decided, what the heck? Why not? I now see myself doing this long-term.

What are some rumors you want to dispel about your area?

First things first, CDCR does not make money off of our recyclables. Also, I do my best to get higher quality toilet paper. We have been able to be resourceful and provide something better for the population and staff. Today, I might know more about feminine hygiene products than anyone at CIW (not something he is necessarily proud of).

Funniest memory working in CIW?

Fifteen years ago we had an assigned worker always in the same, oddest predicaments. This particular day we were working with electrical power jacks we were moving around. Next thing we knew, the hammer had pinned her up against the wall with her feet dangling off the ground. She was laughing so hard she peed herself and says, "I tinkled," as she feels it dripping down, still hanging. She wasn't hurt, just had a little bit of an accident. For sure, one of the funniest memories here.



Hidden Gem Mr. Hamilton

Featured Resident — Monica Diaz

by Kinzie Noordman

For this edition's featured resident, I thought I'd speak with someone who has been a voice for our population as a member of the Incarcerated Persons Advisory Council (IAC) Executive Body. I talked with the current IAC Recording Secretary Monica Diaz about her journey in the IAC, what she envisions for the future, and how she plans to continue to be a voice for our community.

Tell us about your experience as an Executive IAC.

I've been on the Executive Body of the IAC for about 2 years now, and when I first made the decision to run, I was not prepared for the amount of work it would entail. There is no set hours for being an Executive IAC, it is an every day, every hour job, but I love it. We have access to people and places general population can rarely get to, and I think it is important we use this privilege to allow the population's voice to be heard since they can't have the same access we do.

What is your vision for the future of IAC here at CIW?

One of my biggest goals is to make the Executive IAC more accessible. I want everyone to know they can come to any of us with any issues they are having. I think it is important for the Executive Body to be visible, so I want us to start walking the yard once a week just to meet people and connect with them. I want us to go around to all of the housing units to see how we can better support the unit reps. What the unit reps do really matters, and I want them to know how their work helps build upon all the Executive Body tries to accomplish. We all have the same goals, we work on the same team.

Tell us something personal.

Well, I really love pandas (laughs). But, to answer your question, I came to prison super young at 16 years old. I haven't always followed the rules and did not get it immediately. Because of my experience, I feel like I am relatable. I've walked more than one road. I've walked many. I love my community because I have been in some pretty dark places, and I have been able to uplift myself and extend a helping hand to those who may still be in those places. I want people to know it is possible to get out of a negative place. I am living proof.

What are you passionate about?

I'm really passionate about representing the entire population, not just a small segment. In the 25 years I have been incarcerated, I haven't always lived in the best way. Nevertheless, the experience has shown me that just because some people don't follow the rules, it doesn't mean they shouldn't be heard. Everyone's voice matters. We're all trying to make this place better—whether you are IAC or not, whether you program or don't—we all want a better environment to live in.

What else are you passionate about?

The Spanish speaking community is always close to my heart. I feel they are overlooked and often forgotten. I make it a point to ensure they are represented. In both my personal life and as an Executive IAC, it is important for me to give attention to those who don't normally get it. It is not always about one group. Not everyone speaks English, not everyone programs, but everyone matters.



IAC Recording Secretary Monica Diaz

TLM's First AVP Cohort

by Aimee Gana

The Last Mile (TLM), a nonprofit organization that helps empower incarcerated persons (IPs) through education and technology training, has always been known in our community for bringing in the Computer Coding classes—Web Development Fundamentals and Mongo, Express, React, Node. But, little is known about TLM's Audio Video Production (AVP) class. AVP was launched in CIW at the end of April 2024 with 12 students who were excited to add relevant skills that could make them more competitive in the job market upon their parole. It is worth noting that CIW is the very first women's facility to have an AVP cohort through TLM. For about 15 months, the students learned the fundamentals of sound, recording equipment, signal flow, how to edit video, mix sound, create visual effects, and so much more from a curriculum that was divided into two sections—Digital Audio Production (DAP) using AVID Pro Tools and Video Editing and Post-Production (VEP) using DaVinci Resolve.



This class is facilitated by Ms. West, whose dedication to fostering growth is demonstrated through her unwavering support and encouragement. In the absence of an on grounds instructor and Teacher Assistants (TAs), the first cohort learned together while navigating through a Learning Management System (LMS) and Remote Instruction (RI). In RI sessions, students were able to ask a team of dedicated instructors questions regarding the curriculum, ensuring a maximum learning experience.

The AVP course was not just limited to technical skills. The cohort was also trained on developing soft skills through group projects where one learned to work harmoniously and productively with others. Mostly though, students worked on individual projects like producing a series of real-world music, spoken word productions, YouTube end titles, color correction, and many more.

Students were also treated to occasional visits from The Last Mile, NBC Universal, AppleMusic+, Crewvie, Checkr, Legal Aid at Work, Music Forward, Sound Girls, Rora, and other businesses, so students are able to start building their network for possible employment upon parole. After all, there is life waiting for all of us outside these prison walls. One just has to believe it and work towards making it happen.

Colby, Grace, Jane, and Joe—long-term advocates of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP), Emily—abolitionist, advocate and author, Alisa—with *Survived & Punished*, and Alison—UCSD graduate student. They are changing the culture for incarcerated persons from the inside out. Together, they empower societies of women by lifting up their words and holding space for a deep dive into storytelling.

A highlight of the Storytelling Workshop was a panel discussion with Emily Thuma, author of *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*. Emily's visit was the culmination of a feminist abolitionist book club. During the book club, a group of CIW residents gathered for lively discussions about *All Our Trials* to explore the ideological frameworks surrounding the incarceration of women. During the panel, Emily encouraged participants to recognize the value of their personal stories and lived experiences. Emily emphasized the immense value of the women contained within prison walls and the capacity of each of us to educate and inform others with our narratives.

Storytelling allows students who have been incarcerated for decades to process their trials and tribulations in a safe space for the first time ever, using the pillars of long-term incarceration: Family Relations, Health Sets (spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical), Re-victimization, Grief and Loss, Backwards Land, and Media. Unlike typical CIW groups, Storytelling takes place inside the housing unit where participants are left with nowhere to hide and pledge to be present. Establishing boundaries inside prison walls is extremely difficult. Sitting in on the circles, Joe cried over the living fact of just how difficult it is for incarcerated people to establish healthy bonds that “people on the outside do not understand” the depths of. Loneliness develops over years of incarceration; however, the act of storytelling counters this unique form of isolation by allowing stories to come to light without any form of media or documentation. The prison system introduces never-ending waves of deep-seated shame. A storyteller shared a statistic, “There are more people with mental health issues inside prison than inside mental health institutions.” Flooded with self-doubt, a person whirls into a warped way of thinking. Self-care becomes identified as selfish, lazy, or worse – a way of being that does not honor victims or survivors.

When you see a vulnerable person, do you ask yourself. “What is wrong with the person?” Or, “What happened to the person?” Through introducing the buzzing concept of Backwards Land, outside guests remind students, “The stories are a tradition of you all trying to make sense of a place that does not make sense.” The system often teaches women how to be controlled rather than prompting people to make healthy choices for themselves. In addition to this, Backwards Land introduces concepts that are the direct opposite of the women we are striving to become. Rather than becoming comfortable with going to authorities and asking for help, we learn to look the other way. The culture of prison is opposite of who society expects us to be. If you do help someone, by distributing Narcan when a person is overdosing we are investigated on our part in the matter. If we share a sandwich with someone who is hungry, we are reminded Title 15 states IPs are prohibited from sharing food. In fear of asking for help without permanent consequences and documentation, mental health grows to be more of a nuisance than therapeutic. The media shapes the public's perception through fear, and utilizes the tactic to enforce long-term sentencing as a “safe” yet punitive tool. Any sound-minded person would call 911 to ask for help; nonetheless, IPs are forced to practice something other than 911 through hush-hush lifestyles and “yard-down don't move a muscle” mentalities. We all can acknowledge the world we are a part of is backwards. The question remains, will anyone do anything to promote rehabilitative change?

LWOP Support Group Honors Victims

by Monica McCarrick

CIW's Living With Opportunity and Purpose (LWOP) Support Group teamed up with Land Together (formerly known as Insight Garden Project) to plant flowers in the CIW Victim's Garden located on the Warden's Lawn. In honor of the victims, survivors, and families we have traumatized, 25 native drought-tolerant plants and flowers were added to CIW's hidden figures of nature. We kicked off the Saturday grounding by saying a prayer, then read poems and letters in honor of our victims on a dissolvable piece of paper. We later placed them in the soil underneath the plants alongside their roots to be a part of their growth.

The planting ceremony is just one of three events recently hosted by the LWOP group. The LWOP walkathon held in early October generated over \$2,000 for Shriners Hospital. Footage of the planting captured by Mr. Mumm and his team was played at “Connecting Voices,” another LWOP event on October 25. The LWOP community looks forward to offering more opportunities to raise awareness while encouraging healing and acts of service.

Auditorium Renovation

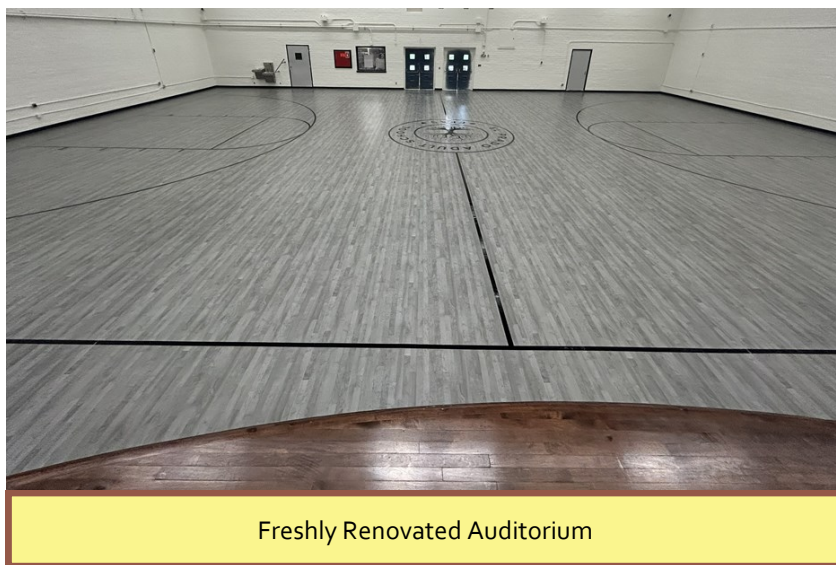
by Monica Diaz

On Monday, September 15, the California Institution for Women (CIW) hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the reopening of the Auditorium. L. Parker, Warden, spoke and called the Auditorium the “Cornerstone and heart of the institution. This is where the community comes together.” Warden Parker expressed gratitude to the El Prado staff for making the renovations possible. He also noted the renovation of the Auditorium has been the most expeditious project he has witnessed since coming to CIW. G. Brown, Retired Principal, returned to CIW for the ceremony. Ms. Brown shared in her opening remarks, “The Auditorium is the center of the community. I felt it was important to improve it so that the space is more welcoming and inviting to everyone, especially the community.” Ms. Brown expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the Office of Correctional Education (OCE) who saw a need at CIW and funded the renovation project. A. Moore, Recreation Coach, shared he has been at CIW for approximately 14-15 years and how important this space is for the population. Coach Moore expressed his thanks to the Administration for their support. S. Padilla, Chief Deputy Warden (CDW), shared that for her it is important for the population to have a “safe and beautiful place where they can come together as a community.”

The renovation project has been a collaborative effort involving many different moving pieces. S. Ward, Principal (A), shared during an interview how “the project for me has been an exciting opportunity to enhance and improve programming ability here at CIW. The upgrade is beyond the aesthetics and will allow for more recreation and fitness activities.” Mr. Ward expressed special thanks to Genevie Candelaria, Superintendent of OCE, for making this project possible.

Jerome Banks, Correctional Plant Supervisor, was a major part of the renovation project. During an interview, Mr. Banks was asked what being a part of this project meant to him. This is what Mr. Banks shared: “Being a part of this project aligns with what I believe is my calling in life. I am in the business of renovation. This project has been rewarding. I have enjoyed the process. There is great fulfillment in seeing a vision come alive when you are able to see the tangible final product.” Mr. Banks was asked what impact this project will have on the residents of CIW. Mr. Banks stated, “I believe this Auditorium will provide a positive change for the CIW community. The Auditorium will serve as a space which is multifaceted such as for graduations, church services, and fundraiser sales. I believe the space will inspire the community to stand more closely together.” Mr. Banks shared the contractor used for the floor renovation is Rod West Flooring.

The demolition part of the project was completed by workers from CIW’s Plant Operations. Mike Marcy, Carpenter III, stated, “It’s been interesting to watch the progress of the project. A lot of work has come from the various Plant Operations shops: painters, electricians, maintenance mechanics, and carpenters have all done their part to prepare for the subcontractors. It’s been overwhelming how Plant Ops staff have come together as one to get it done.” Mr. Marcy attributes a lot of the hard work done to the workers. Mr. Marcy states, “The incarcerated persons who worked on this project are always willing to go above and beyond my expectations. They never walk away from a job until the site is safe and clean. I continue to be amazed at how much I have learned from them.”



Part 2: Mothering in Prison Series—Facing Challenges

by Rebecca Grossman

At the time of my incarceration, my children were teenagers. The fact that they were in this stage of development ironically created a silver lining on the dark cloud of our separation. It is without question tough, and at times, beyond challenging to parent a child at any age from prison. Yet, I found that with teens it was a double-edged sword. Reason being, like many other this age, they morph into an all-knowing individual quite rapidly overnight. At the same time, the two people that brought these precious souls into the world were suddenly deemed imbeciles. By chance, I narrowly escaped the close encounter of the erudite kind, in turn, leaving my poor husband to shoulder the attitude and gas lighting regarding his alleged intellectual decline. Through the transformation of life-at-home, the blessing of me not being in their face and space every day inadvertently resulted in my words becoming somewhat revered. I continue to be awestruck that they willingly engage in meaningful dialogue with me. Their father, on the other hand, is left with one-word answers, the roll of the eyes, and bedroom doors slamming shut. Nevertheless, the closeness that resulted between me and my estranged children became a welcome godsend. Immensely grateful for this gift, I continue to encourage my children to respect those tending to the core parenting in my absence.

So how does a mother lovingly guide and support their children through difficult life-changing moments from behind prison walls? For the second part of our “Mothering in Prison Series,” we got some advice from a few incarcerated mothers regarding how to help manage those challenges.

When it comes to communicating and direct messaging, former IP importance of “active listening and children through hardship: a death in abuse in the home, relocating homes She shared that her entire family challenges. Considering the stress youth can, in fact, be lessened by them know you love and support

IP Victoria Corrales also offered family members since you are not present by asking questions, being a offering guidance if needed.” She never give up and always stay decisions, milestones, and accomplishments.”



Bonding with child

**Check out some great books
on parenting available at
the Library!**

with our children through phone calls Carmen Lopez emphasizes the uplifting support while guiding your the family, family blending, substance – all qualify as significant life events.” bands together when a child is facing and anxiety that so often accompanies “offering reinforcement and letting them no matter what they do.”

sage advice, “leave the discipline up to there to reinforce it, but continue to be listening ear for your children, and added that “equally important is to positive. Continually praise their good

IP Tiffany McGuire spoke on co-parenting from inside by suggesting, “keeping an open line of communication with the support system who help your children while you are incarcerated...come up with solutions together.” Again, this is invaluable information taking in consideration that encouraging independent choices and solution-oriented thinking can be a source of empowerment at a time where there may be some feelings of abandonment. I once took a parenting class called, *Shepherding Your Child’s Heart*, where the instructor reinforced carefully selecting your words by substituting words like “concerned” in lieu of “disappointed,” to empower our offspring with the opportunity to rebound from an impulsive decision.

IP Cecilia Ochoa wisely recommends prayer and says, “Don’t let worry or fear steal your peace. Maintaining an alert mind to better communicate, support, and guide your children is essential.”

Finally, IP Bani Duarte articulates that “people make mistakes but it is about accountability, learning from them, and moving forward.” Indeed, acknowledging that your feet are made of clay unveils the imperfect beauty from which humankind is sculpted.

With all of the amazing programs at the fingertips of CIW moms, in addition to the extraordinary mothers inside the community, there is no doubt our village provides unique perspectives gained through personal battles and incomparable life experiences. We are truly an exceptional vortex of collective prudence and exquisiteness—a gift to be bestowed upon our broods, even from afar. Embrace the certainty that your precious virtues may easily become theirs.

Fear For Breakfast

by Grace Coleman

When invited into the chapel on a Monday morning to have fear for breakfast, attendees were not quite sure what to expect. Fear for Breakfast Executive Director Tue Huynh explained to the circle, “We are not just here to hear the story, but we are going to feel it.” Fear for Breakfast is a restorative justice organization that hosts victim impact workshops across Southern California. On September 8, the strong-spirited team held their workshop inside prison for the first time ever. Early in the workshop, Fear for Breakfast volunteers passed out role playing cards and a warning: “These stories are based off of real-life events.”

Residents acted out different roles—the perpetrator, judge, victim’s sister, perpetrator’s mother, news broadcasters, etc.—in a crime that occurred from April 24 to 25, 1981, in San Mateo County. A participant assigned the role of the victim’s sister proclaimed, “I will never forgive, because I feel I am honoring my sister by remaining angry... Say her name.” In the role of the deceased, Stacey said, “I thought I was going out with my best friends, but instead I was tortured.” Volunteer Malcolm played the role of the perpetrator’s parent voicing the challenges of what it is like to face the guilt and grief of your daughter not only being capable of committing a crime, but still being alive while another daughter’s life is gone.



IP Misti signing a tribute to her victims

A woman off to the sidelines who portrayed herself as an outsider looking in stepped behind the microphone and caused the whispers throughout the sacred space to fall silent. She humbly confessed, “I am not playing a role here today. I am the actual killer.” The women sitting in their seats were shocked. Her startling statement filled the room, as heads turned left and right and jaws dropped. As a formerly incarcerated woman, who did time inside CCWF for several decades, Ricky admitted her pathway to healing did not end the day she stepped outside of prison gates. Today, Ricky can live her life peacefully, yet she chooses to continue to take accountability and make an impact by sharing her testimony throughout California. Participants gained a fresh sense of awareness by recognizing accountability does not guarantee any form of forgiveness—nor is it an excuse for the horrendous harms we have caused. Genuine accountability is the first step towards the exit off the cycle of anger, resentment, and past unhealthy patterns.

Hearts are one step closer to healing, thanks to Fear for Breakfast. The workshop culminated with a powerful sound healing activity. Whatever trauma, brokenness, and toxic thoughts participants walked into the room with were left right there in the Chapel. Any underlying fear carried throughout daily lives was lifted by the overwhelming sounds of the healing event’s sound bath. One gong strike after another, the room was filled with a feeling many participants have never before experienced. Somehow, somehow, Fear for Breakfast allowed people to step back into the CIW community with a little bit more love and gratitude for the people they are today and the women they are continuously becoming.



Leaders of the event alongside supporters



CIW Community joining together to celebrate Fear for Breakfast

Celebrate Recovery

by Kinzie Noordman

Someone once said that every journey starts with a single step. I don't know who coined this phrase, but it is true for both physical and metaphorical journeys. For me, my recovery journey also began with a single step, and that step was joining the Celebrate Recovery (CR) program. When I first joined CR in 2010, I was 27 years old and seven years into my life sentence. At that time, my life was the definition of unmanageable and if I'm honest, it had been that way long before I came to prison. But it wasn't my struggle with substance abuse that was my main problem, it was relationships. Prior to coming to prison, I had never heard of the word codependent, yet that is exactly what I was. I found my sanity in the approval of others; I allowed other people's behaviors to affect me, then sought to control their behavior in order to manage my emotions.

Through the CR program I was able to explore the "hurts, habits, and hang-ups" that were at the root of my behavior and belief systems. It was the beginning of my journey of self-discovery and accountability—a journey that would eventually lead me to inner freedom from my codependent behaviors, my addictions, and eventually even freedom from the guilt and shame I carried from my past.

What makes CR so different from other recovery programs is that it is based on Biblical truths and teachings. CR Founder John Baker created the "8 Principles" based on Jesus' teachings in the Beatitudes. Using these principles and other scriptures as a foundation, Baker created the four CR workbooks to help others heal and find freedom. Whether you struggle with substance abuse, relationships, anger, anxiety, or any other addiction, CR is the place for you to find healing. In CR, we don't just talk about the 12 steps, we actually work them by answering personal questions and building a stronger relationship with God and others. CR is led by a caring team of outside volunteers who facilitate the small groups alongside incarcerated leaders. Every week, these volunteers brave the Southern California traffic to share their recovery experiences and help others with theirs. The program would not be the same without them.

This summer, another set of graduates completed the yearlong CR program. CR graduates, leaders, and volunteers celebrated their recovery success at the Chapel on August 13. The celebration began with CR Outside Leader Bob welcoming the graduates and commending them for their dedication to seeing the program through. Inside Leader Precious McDuff-Brown shared a mini version of her testimony while everyone fellowshiped together. The entire outside volunteer team passed out certificates and gave each participant a journal, Chapstick, and inspirational book. Prior to giving her testimony, outside Leader Monja provided everyone with a picture of a wooden sign of the word "Imagine." She then shared an intimate account of how she found it shortly after the death of her mom. Monja recounted how she took this as a proverbial sign from God because her mother's favorite song was "I Can Only Imagine." She knew that God was telling her that her mom was at peace and she should be too.

The big treat of the night was the worship performance by special guest singer Richard Andrew that wrapped up the event. Richard, a frequent guest singer at CR events at CIW, took time away from a tour on the East Coast to perform at the graduation. After a few songs, Richard also shared his personal journey of recovery with the graduates. Like so many others in recovery, Richard's life became unmanageable as his personal shortcomings led to a drug addiction, crime, and eventually a prison term. He learned to play guitar while he was incarcerated and once released, joined a CR program in order to work on himself so that he would never again let his life get so out of control.

For those who still need to take their first step in their recovery journey, CR might very well be the place to start. We meet every Wednesday night from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm and even offer a group in Spanish. Be brave, take that first step. It will be the beginning of a journey you won't soon forget or regret.

Zepbound: Life-Changing Perspectives

by Grace Coleman

Did you know they offer free GLP-1s in prison? Have you wondered about people's personal experiences with pharmaceutical assisted weight loss? Read the following stories to learn more about the life-changing impact of GLP-1s:

Kelly Wolfe

"Since I have been incarcerated, I have gained over 70 pounds. I never had serious health issues before I came to prison. Due to my thyroid and sluggish metabolism, as well as the minimal amount of healthy foods in prison's strict diet consisting of an overabundance of junk food, the sedentary lifestyle prison evokes makes it dang near difficult to live a healthy life.

First off, I am not a fan of pharmaceuticals. When I was first offered the shot, I wanted it because I was so tired of being fat; however, I was apprehensive. While I prefer the natural holistic approach, in prison it does not exist. I really did not know much about Zepbound, other than a bunch of people all over the world losing weight on it. My biggest concern was both the short and long term side effects. After a family member sent me some information on the drug, I realized it has been out for over a decade. Smashing the stigma of this drug being unknown and brand new, I learned the potential side effects were minimal compared to the health benefits I would gain by losing the weight I was carrying.

The shot has sparked a whole new era in my relationship with food inside. Rather than living to eat, I am eating to live. I am choosing high power protein and high fiber foods, as well as making the liberating decision to cut out sugary soaked junk foods. In the starting days of taking the shot, when I consumed any kind of sugar, like my typical morning coffee, I would feel this heavy sense of nausea. At the end of it all, the sugar-induced sickness turned out to be a positive, for it prompted my body to eliminate my sugar cravings all together.

What could improve my health and wellness journey? Access to fruits and vegetables and high-fiber foods. Our Canteen Department in CIW lacks healthy foods – leaving us with no more than five healthy items that have to be consumed within hours of shopping. With equal access to healthy food, rather than an overload of sugar and never-ending carbs, we as an overweight population would have the ability to eliminate health concerns. I have now been on the shot for one year and lost every pound I gained in prison. I am now on a lower dosage of Zepbound and on maintenance mode. I am back to my normal size. All of my health issues have lessened. I have more energy, and my self-esteem has improved — in addition to, my lifelong yoga practice."

Amber Riley

"In CCWF, I was 300 pounds. Because I am 6 feet tall, no one ever realized I was carrying the weight of another person. Having access to weight-loss medication through Medical has changed my life. I have been incarcerated for over 22 years. Since I was 16, my weight has always been fairly high. While I have always been an active person, I have never had access to pricey high quality healthy foods and proteins, nor the time to work out while participating in prison programming. Working hard labor jobs inside –construction and maintenance jobs such as IDL and HFM – took a large toll on my body, particularly in my joints and back. For many years, being overweight caused pain and other health issues I never wanted nor expected. I'm not lazy, I do not stuff my face with junk; nonetheless, affordable foods like soups, rice, snacks, and chow hall cuisine are far from nutritious – not to mention, full of high sodium, high carbs, and empty calories.

Today, I have lost over 100 pounds. Over the past couple of years, my quality of life is so much better. I do not have nearly as much pain – or acid reflux – and my energy is finally back. My self-confidence and mental health is, we'll just say, in a much better place.

We are all beautiful and worthy no matter what size we are or how we look. Losing weight and having more access to better health care is vital to our physical health, mental health, and overall quality of life. I am grateful for

the opportunity to have a better present and future. My hope for the future? For people to show kindness and compassion to all body types without judging the types of medications they may need in order to live healthier and save lives." - Amber Riley



Kelly Wolfe



Shauna Burton



Amber Riley

Running Club

by Trang Luu

Taking care of the physical body is an important aspect of maintaining our wellness. Some like the fast pace of aerobics. Others prefer the fluid movements of yoga. And walking can be a calming and meditative activity. Then there are those who enjoy the fast, yet fluid and calming motion of running. This year, former Principal Brown, Principal Ward, and Coach Moore brought a new opportunity to CIW to take care of our physical health—Running Club.

On May 1, San Quentin's 1000 Mile Club coaches were invited to kick start CIW's Running Club. The goal is to eventually have members running a half-marathon, a 13-mile stretch, sometime next year. CIW Women's Running Club welcomes all levels of runners.

Running is not easy. It requires dedication and commitment. It requires discipline to consistently train in order to achieve your goals. CIW is privileged to have Coach Jana and the San Quentin coaches available to advise and train our runners to prepare for this upcoming challenge.

Coach Jana visits CIW twice a month to provide personal training to each runner. She trains three groups of runners: level one for new runners, level two for intermediate runners, and level three for the seasoned runners. Coach Jana also celebrates each runner's accomplishments with certificates. Each runner earns a certificate for completing timed runs and for reaching the cumulative distances of 100 miles, 250 miles, and 500 miles.

Why do I run? Running benefits physical and mental resilience. When I'm sprinting on the Rec Field, I feel fully in tune to my mind and body. Running allows me to be patient and kind to myself. I learn to adjust to my physical limitations and acknowledge what I can accomplish – whether it is one lap or one mile for each run. I set my focus on moving one step forward and not giving up. As in life, I learn to honor small achievements and keep pushing forward even when I feel I am at my limit. I also get to support and cheer for my peers. We have to start before we can finish.

IP Grace Coleman is a motivating member of our Running Club team. When asked why she joined, Grace shared, "When I arrived to CIW from C-Yard in Chowchilla, the Rec field became a safe place for my mental and spiritual sanity. Transferring was not easy, and my anxiety from being away from my family in prison reached an all-time high." Grace ran daily in Chowchilla and used the physical activity as an escape from prison problems. Today, she runs in the CIW Running Club to help promote positive lifestyle, health, and wellness in prison.

Thank you to Principal Ward, Coach Moore, Coach Jana, and the coaches of San Quentin for making this activity available to CIW's IPs.

Time For Change Foundation

by Aimee Gana

On July 2, representatives from Time For Change Foundation (TFCF) came to tell the population that they "do not offer a handout, but instead, a hand up." That statement alone is enough to tell you that their foundation does not merely exist to dole out gifts. They use proven strategies to help one transition and thrive permanently. Aside from offering a housing program, they also offer strengths-based case management, licensed drug and alcohol treatment, employment development, financial literacy, family reunification, parenting education, health and nutrition wellness, leadership development, transportation, and more. Their programs and services are tailored to address individual needs.

Aimee Durante, TFCF's Program Administrator, shared how her journey with TFCF started 13 years ago. When Aimee lost custody of her two sons, she numbed her pain with methamphetamines and other drugs. But TFCF gave her the support and resources she needed. Today, she bravely shares that she has turned her pain into living a purposeful life, helping women in need get back on track.

Vanessa Perez, TFCF's Executive Director, shared how TFCF started 23 years ago by giving a background on founder and ambassador Kim Carter (now Dr. Kim Carter-Tillman). TFCF's reentry services are structured to help any parolee build their future.

Listening to Dr. Kim Carter-Tillman talk in front of CIW residents at the Auditorium on July 2, you would not even think that Dr. Tillman used to live in Barneberg decades ago. Sharing that she was in and out of prison then, she proudly says that she went from "breaking the law to making law." And this is exactly what workshops like these are about. They are meant to show how one can rise from a journey of addiction to rebuild their lives. Her notable journey has caught the attention of so many that she was named 2025 National Remarkable Woman of the Year. Her life is also being filmed into a movie, "Tell It Like A Woman," directed by Taraji P. Henson. Jennifer Hudson will be playing her.

For more information, write TFCF at P.O. Box 25040, San Bernardino, CA 92406, or call (909) 886-2994.

Mask On/Mask Off

by Koi Bagnerise

Originating at CCWF, Mask On/Mask Off (MOMO) made its CIW debut in mid-2024. MOMO concluded its 2nd cohort with a celebrative and empowering graduation on Sunday, August 3. Certificates of completion were presented, alongside powerful and affirming energy to elevate the frequencies in each of the graduates' individual worlds. Surrounded by influential guest speakers in association with and supported by Poetic Justice, Uncuffed, ReEvolution, Success Stories, the Community Resource Department, and other rehabilitative organizations, these inspiring leaders in our community contribute to the growth and the reach of MOMO's influence. MOMO's extensive curriculum was thoughtfully developed by yours truly with profound compassion, a mind of healing, and a passion to empower and bare the enigmatic hearts that implore of us to search within for meaning and true understanding. MOMO presents these full disclosure questions: Why are we afraid to walk boldly in our truth? Who watered the seeds of shame in our hearts? Who taught us that who we are is not enough? Who told us that we were not beautiful? MOMO aims to provide support, encouragement, and transformative wisdom accompanied by the essential tools required to not only answer these questions but to delve into traumatic events that incited these harmful feelings within. Our mission is to plant seeds of healing to be watered in love to transform the soil of our community to blossom unapologetically in absolute harmony and mutuality. Sometimes it is easier to love the pretty things about ourselves rather than the ugly parts living in all of us that most desperately need to be loved. The women in this community are made of miracles, magic, and nothing short of immaculate blessings. The tragedy lies in not recognizing the beauty, resilience, and strength that live in each and every one of us. We all know how hate cripples us, so let's give ourselves a chance to witness how love heals us. MOMO explores the elements of shame and fear that gives its name to stagnation which hinders us from reaching our complete potential as women, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and friends. MOMO cultivates love from the inside out by addressing the fear of embracing our true identities that were lost, stolen, and distorted through the lens of trauma. Abuse is often the root of trauma that destroys self-esteem and rips us so far away from ourselves that we are unable to reclaim ourselves without the love and support of another woman who has conquered the same beast. Women of CIW, please kiss your own skin, recognize your own beauty, be kind to your inner child because she's watching and listening, and love yourself as deeply and as passionately as you have always dreamed to be loved. MOMO is scheduled in 8-week clusters on the 1st and 3rd Sundays from 10:00 am-12:00 PM, co-facilitated by Debra Bockorny in SAP4. Ask to be placed on the waitlist by submitting a 2016 Form to the CRM. MOMO is everlastingly awaiting the opportunity to unify, embrace, and empower as many women as are open to be positively reinforced. And if you see me and you need someone to listen, come to me but take off the mask when you speak to me because you are safe. You are strong. You are worthy. You are enough.



Mask On/Mask Off Participants and Facilitators

Have You Ever Had A Sound Bath?

by Stephanie Lazarus

On July 14 and September 8, the Women of Wisdom (WOW) participants were treated to a Sound Bath by outside guest and WOW volunteer Kristine Linares. For the past seven years, Kristine has been practicing healing others through various methods of touch, sound, guided meditation, and breath work. For both sessions, Kristine used crystal bowls of different sizes, arranged on the floor in a semi-circle. Participants were given the option to lie on a yoga mat or sit on a chair. Kristine then used a mallet to get the bowls to emit a sound frequency. As an added treat, Kristine sang during the sessions and she has a voice of an angel. The combination of her voice and the beautiful and diverse sounds the bowls emitted made the whole experience peaceful. After both sound baths, participants felt relaxed and energized. IP Jessicah Cowan, a WOW participant, found that it was easy, saying, "There is no need to chant, follow any breathing patterns, or focus on anything. All I needed to do was listen and let the sound do its work."

By definition, a sound bath is a meditative experience in which waves of sound wash over you. Contrary to what the name suggests, there is actually no water involved. The usage of the word "bath" comes from the idea that the experience can make you feel like you are being drenched in sound vibrations. Even Kristine said that we often use sound to soothe or calm ourselves by singing or humming.

At our September session, yoga instructor and WOW volunteer Rebecca Fink warmed us up with chair yoga. After that, Kristine used a tuning fork that had the frequency of "Mother Earth," which is 19.8 Hertz. She then placed it next to a willing participant's ear and then near their heart. This was very relaxing.

A fun fact about Kristine is that in 1995, she traveled around the country for four years performing as Kim, the lead

role, in Miss Saigon. She also played Kim for one year on Broadway in 1999. Kristine, who is very honored to serve everyone here at CIW, has a practice in the City of Orange. In case you want to recommend her to family and friends, her website is www.ascensionqw.com. Anyone can benefit from a sound bath, as it may help lower stress, improve mood, and support one's emotional well-being.



Kristine Linares



Crystal bowls arranged in a semi-circle

Last night, I handed my husband the glue stick
instead of Chapstick!

~ He's still not talking to me



If a child refuses to nap, are they resisting a rest?

Laugh
with

Lazarus!

Peer Support Specialist Program

by Kinzie Noordman

Audrey just got here from A-yard. She's serving a ten-year sentence and heard there's a lot of programs here at CIW that will help her earn time off. Audrey also promised her family she'd get her GED before paroling and is hoping to participate in workforce training to assist her with finding a job in the community.

Brittney has been incarcerated for several years, but only recently got sober. This is her fourth attempt at getting clean and she really wants to stay clean this time.

Marcel is a lifer who just found out he'll be going to the Board of Parole Hearing next year. He knew this day was coming but hasn't done much to prepare. He'd like to take the next several months to focus on getting ready.

Stephanie is elderly and sometimes has a hard time remembering everything the doctors and nurses tell her. She really needs help navigating clinic appointments.

By now, you might be wondering what these four people have in common. Well, they can all benefit from services provided by the newly trained Peer Support Specialists (PSSs). The team of 25 individuals were carefully selected from the population and received their certification on September 17 at a graduation ceremony held in CIW's newly refurbished Auditorium. The PSSs can help Audrey make concrete plans to earn her GED, support Brittney through her sobriety, guide Marcel in preparing for Board, and assist Stephanie with her medical appointments. After braving the intense eight-week training, the PSSs are now in a position to help any of their fellow community members at CIW.

The PSS program is a nationwide program recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that has been implemented within CDCR. The PSS program has been rolled out in phases across California prisons. CCWF began their PSS program in 2023, but it did not reach CIW until June 2025. As PSSs, the graduates are trained to support their peers who might be struggling or just need someone to talk with. They are here to help their peers to navigate through their prison journey, whether through guidance, modeling coping skills, helping to plan goals or facilitating self-help groups. To put it in the words of J.K. Elliot, CEO CCHCS, who spoke at the graduation, "peer support is about believing in people while helping them believe in themselves."

Two CIW staff, one each from the Custody and Medical areas, were selected to receive extensive training and become Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for the PSSP. The two SMEs, Lieutenant Avina and Gabriel Lopez, Medical Staff Services Analyst, trained the PSSs and continue to support the PSS roll out. The pride and sense of accomplishment that Lieutenant Avina feels for the new PSSs was palpable as she took her turn to speak. She shared how she felt honored to have been able to take part in the new program and how the training helped her to better understand herself. She left the graduates with a nugget of wisdom, reminding them that no one has to be watching for them to do something good for someone else. Gabriel added that seeing the way that each graduate grew throughout the training was a "beautiful" thing and that he looks forward to seeing where the new PSSs would take the program in the future.

Two PSSs spoke on behalf of the graduates. PSS Reba Curwood described how the program taught her so much about "empathy and trauma-informed care" and how to meet others without judgment, adding that "through empowerment, collaboration, and self-determination," the PSS program has become a resource for people in a place that needs it the most. PSS Cecilia Ochoa spoke about the importance of working as a team, sharing an African proverb with the group, telling them that "if you want to go far, go alone. If you want to go farther, go together." Cecilia further encouraged the graduates by telling them that they all have something to give the world and that their experiences can help others "get out of the mire." IP Mary Kruppe, a PSS from CCWF, came on board to support the new trainees and show them what the program was about. She also shared at the graduation, reminding them that the program is only as strong as the individual PSSs are together and encouraged them to make a difference by changing CIW for the better.

Clearly no stranger to public speaking, Mr. Elliot gave his admiration for the graduates, telling them that their lived experience gives them a "unique edge" over other professionally trained individuals. He reminded them that "sometimes the best journeys in life are the ones we didn't plan for," and that they should be proud of the work they are going to do and the people they will help, adding that it is a "very powerful thing to give support and hope to a person in need." Other prominent speakers who came to express their appreciation for the graduates included AW D. Lewis and Dr. Hood, Patient Safety and Quality Manager, who came all the way from Sacramento. After presenting each graduate with a certificate, Lieutenant Avina and Gabriel Lopez were surprised with a handmade card signed by all the graduates. Immanuel Baptist Church in Highland graciously donated t-shirts to every graduate so that the PSSs could be easily identified when walking the yard. The church also donated a large banner displayed at the graduation, its message an encouraging reminder of what stands at the heart of this new program: "Self-empowerment, resilience, self-advocacy,

- see PSSP on pg. 15 —

hope, and community,” which are all qualities that can benefit every resident of CIW. As PSS Cecilia Ochoa so eloquently expressed, the PSS program will help people become “who they were truly meant to be.”

If you want to learn more about the PSS program, look for information posted in each housing unit. PSS services include individual support in a variety of areas from difficult life events to preparing for release. PSSs also facilitate groups focused on different topics including Affirmations, Life Skills, Substance Abuse Triggers, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Defense Mechanisms, and many more. Anyone can request PSS services by signing up on the sign up sheets found in every unit or by seeking out a PSS on the yard. Look for the PSSs wearing dark gray t-shirts or gold smocks with “Peer Support” in purple lettering on the back.



“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate the beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier, because you have lived. This is to have succeeded. May we all know, today, we are a success.”

✧Benediction shared by PSS Graduate Reba Curwood✧

The Play's The Thing: Actor's Gang Workshop

by Stacy Walker

On a Monday morning in July, Visiting was transformed into a theater. Incarcerated Persons (IPs), invited guests, and volunteers from a Culver City-based theater group came together to play theater games, share the Actor's Gang program, impact the participants, and celebrate individual IPs for their dedication and commitment.

The Actor's Gang is a theater that has been producing shows since the 1980s. Their Prison Project sends teaching artists into correctional facilities to share their techniques, which are based on the classical Italian art form Commedia dell'Arte, with IPs. The technique utilizes four basic emotions, or “states” – happy, sad, angry, and fearful – to tell stories about human relationships and help individuals express themselves.

In addition to a live demonstration of the Actor's Gang approach, the invitational workshop recognized ongoing commitment from some of the CIW group's core members. IPs Vanessa Cortes and Chelsea Sieber both received certificates recognizing one year of participation in the group. IP Kier Anderson received honors for three years of involvement. IP Denise Chades received the highest accolade for ten years with the group. According to Actor's Gang Managing Director Hannah, this is the longest commitment ever recognized by the Prison Project, not only at CIW, but at any of their partner correctional facilities.

“This group is different than any of the other groups here [at CIW],” shared IP Vanessa. She added, “It's like a family. In other groups, we talk a lot about emotions, but in here we actually get to feel them.” Outside guests were also moved by the process. Visitor Angie S. told the group that it was “really beautiful to watch everyone being so vulnerable and courageous in such an unexpected place.”

If you're open to a different sort of group experience where you can share, laugh, be creative, and connect with other IPs, check out the Actor's Gang. We meet every Saturday morning from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

Defy-ing the Odds One Idea At a Time

by Stacy Walker

Between our anxiety and the mid-morning heat, most of us were sweating before the event even started. Questions swirled in our minds: Would we do well? Would we be heard? Would the A/C be on in the CRM?

For Defy Ventures' (DV) latest CIW cohort, August 6 was the culmination of seven months of dedication, inspiration, and perseverance. Since January, the group's ranks had thinned to 28 Incarcerated Persons (IPs) who stuck with the rigorous program to the end. On this intensely sunny Wednesday, each of us would pitch our finalized business plans and graduate the program.

To say the program was challenging would be an understatement. We had developed business concepts, conducted market research, understood our competition, developed customer demographics, considered financials, and practiced public speaking skills. We had learned how to utilize knowledge gained before and during incarceration to strengthen our post-release plans. And most importantly, we determined how to tell the stories of our incarceration without shame, displaying our accountability as an asset to future employers and investors.

We went through business coaching days and peer feedback. We received feedback from peer facilitators who had previously graduated the program, as well as Defy staff and volunteers. We worked our way through *four* grueling textbooks, navigated institutional lockdowns, and accepted the closure of the Auditorium that led to a last-minute change in the ability for friends and family to attend. Through all the tumult and pressure, the cohort demonstrated the grit and tenacity to finish the program strong.

August 6 was both a graduation and a competition for the IPs, which DV refers to as Entrepreneurs in Training (EIT). Successfully completing our coursework earned each of us a Certificate of Entrepreneurship from the Drucker School of Business. The competition half of the day—where we pitched our business ideas to volunteers from various industries from all over Southern California—was where the nerves came in.

Public relations and marketing agents, advertising executives, wealth advisors, agency presidents, and CEOs came to the institution to listen to our business pitches, ask questions, give us feedback, and select their choices for the strongest pitch. After a whirlwind five rounds of pitching, fielding their questions, receiving feedback, and expressing our mutual gratitude for one another (a practice Defy calls "sweet sheeting"), the EITs were able to exhale. For all but five of us, the hardest part was over.

The graduation was short and somewhat bittersweet. For those of us who had invited friends and family who were no longer permitted to attend, the celebration fell short. DV staff and volunteers did their best to cheer us on and recognize our accomplishment. Then Quan Huynh, DV's Executive Director of Southern California, announced the finalists—the EITs from each subgroup who had been selected to pitch their business to the whole group.

EITs Keyna Osorio, Nay Thomas, P. Bellows, Mychelle Davis, and myself were selected from our respective groups. Each of us gave our three-minute pitches to the staff, volunteers, and our peers—a crowd of approximately 75. A mobile car-detailing service, an innovative way to deliver MP3 audio to the incarcerated community, a mouth-watering new wings restaurant, a funeral event planner, and an original podcast venture were just a small representation of the brilliant, creative, and promising ideas of a talented cohort EITs ready to defy the odds and prove that we are more than our criminal records.

I found myself in front of the crowd with a microphone in my hand, being asked to give an impromptu speech. I am grateful that I had the chance to acknowledge the honor of being in the same room with so many brilliant and powerful minds—yes, the volunteers and staff who gave so much—but most notably my fellow EITs who have taught me so much about trusting myself and letting go of the stigma of incarceration. I'm incredibly proud of what we accomplished.

*Stacy Walker won first place in the August 2025 pitch competition for her funeral event planning business. Second place honors went to **Keyna Osorio** for Mental Jamz. Third place to **Mychelle Davis** for Mychelle's Worldly Wings. Fourth to **Nay Thomas** for Nomad's Car Detailing, and fifth place to **P. Bellows** for the Mixed podcast.*

Defy and Happy Returns

by Grace Coleman

Part of being an entrepreneur is failing, a lot. With failure, comes resiliency. In prison people find innovative ways to overcome challenges while tucked in their cubicle cells; while, entrepreneurs artistically develop business endeavors in all the places they go. Defy Ventures brings entrepreneurs and CEOs from all across the globe into prisons from California to the Upper East Coast.

One of these inspirational CEOs is David, who built up his \$400 million company, the ecommerce platform Happy Returns, through ten years of blood, sweat, and tears. Today, he is searching for his next big gig. David and his business partner Kerri walked into CIW to meet with Defy's 2025 Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs) days before their business pitch competition.

Defy's mission is to guide EITs into taking calculated risks. While EITs may have taken a few toxic risks to land themselves behind bars, Defy prompts participants to elevate their hustle to a new level. Defy Ventures' CEO Andrew stresses to EITs leaving prison to continue to water the roots of their inner-entrepreneurial hearts. His additional advice? "Land a job to continue to drive funds to launch." Andrew reminds IPs the realities of starting a supportive business after doing time. Similar to the daily program grind and the constant striving to get home, Andrew reminds participants, "Building a business does not happen overnight...[and] the biggest investment you will ever make is in yourself." People invest in people. Because of this, there lies a risk. Becoming aware of your truth and owning your truth, you have the power to pursue what you love. Defy offers an opportunity to refute negative messages and reject past patterns like every person who ever said, "You never finish anything you start"; every job you've been fired from; every class you didn't pass; and every night you spent feeling cold-hearted in a cold cell. Before jumpstarting your business, choose to jumpstart yourself. Defy pushes incarcerated people to press restart on their life by becoming the CEO of their new life. Restoring your reputation matters, and there is comfort in knowing you can take charge of your new restored life.

CIW's First Uncuffed Graduation

by Stephanie Lazarus

Not knowing much about Uncuffed, word on the prison yard is that it is a storytelling podcast from inside prison walls. Apparently, the podcast was started by Greg Eskridge over a decade ago in San Quentin. In January 2025, Uncuffed came to CIW to train the first six participants in the country from a women's prison. Uncuffed is a program of KALW Public Media, which is broadcast in the San Francisco Bay Area on 91.7 FM. At the Uncuffed graduation on September 27, KALW representatives and Uncuffed staff joined CIW Uncuffed graduates to celebrate their completion of the first cohort at CIW. Program Director Eli Wirtschaffer and CIW Program Coordinator Chirae "Shy" Cannon were a few of the Uncuffed team present, alongside now Associate Program Director Greg Eskridge—who gave an inspiring summary of the program and its participants.

Uncuffed graduates Koi Bagnerise, P. Bellows, Julie Harper, Daphnye Luster, Keyna Osorio, and Haena Worthing underwent an applicant interview process and were chosen due to their uniquely diverse life experiences. During the podcast training, participants learned to utilize ProTools and technical audio skillsets to pursue a career, as well as express their humanity in order to inspire change for incarcerated women. Through empathy building, their different perspectives strengthened their human connections and enhanced their storytelling abilities. Uncuffed member Koi expressed, "Despite the group diversity from varied social and ethnic backgrounds, trauma was the precursor to incarceration." The audience listened in on some of the content the group produced demonstrating how trauma played a key role in underlying issues throughout their day-to-day lives: mothering in prison, substance abuse, and numerous layers of grief. Uncuffed's Shy recognized that each of the six participants shared a mutual, "professional drive," to absorb storytelling techniques while continuing to persevere through being in prison.

Interested in the next podcasting cohort of Uncuffed? In a series of seven month sessions, Uncuffed is coming back to CIW on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5:30 pm-7:30 pm and Saturday from 10:00 am-2:00 pm. You can also listen to Uncuffed on Edovo – including the CIW participants' podcast—Season 4: Episode 5 titled "The Truth."



Uncuffed Graduation

Ella Baker Center Workshop on RJA and Resentencing

by Stacey Barker

At any point during your experience of entering into the justice system, from arrest to sentencing, did you experience discrimination based on your race, ethnicity, or national origin? If so, are you unsure how to advocate for your human rights? Do you have any questions about initiating a resentencing hearing? On September 20, representatives from the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) and the San Bernardino County Public Defenders Office (SBCPD) came and put on an informational workshop. Morgan (EBC Prison Advocacy Manager), Claudia (EBC Attorney), Bethlehem (EBC Senior Program Coordinator), Colleen (SBCPD Attorney), Wayne (SBCPD), Carla (SBCPD Mediation Specialist), and our very own Susan Bustamante (first LWOP to parole from CIW) were the guest speakers.

George Floyd's death, which sparked the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, has created demand and need to end systemic racism and police violence. California's disparity in incarceration rates for people of color is more extreme than Southern states like Louisiana. This is the inspiration behind the creation of the Racial Justice Act (RJA). It creates a pathway for California residents to challenge discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. AB 1071, which is currently pending signature by Gov. Newsom, will provide more clarity to the courts about the RJA law, guarantee access to needed data information, and ensure a remedy is provided. Under Penal Code 745, four types of behavior violate the law: 1.) explicit bias against the defendant—such as racial profiling, racially charged language, even comparing one to an animal such as a super predator; 2.) implicit bias and racist statements—such as racially discriminatory language whether or not they were direct and intentional; 3.) overcharging, known as charging disparities, which can be proven through comparison of data within the same county—such as if 99% of people of color are charged with gang charges compared to less than 1% of white people; 4.) sentencing disparities—such as when most people on death row are not white, which can be proven through data within the same county.

When filing a claim under RJA, you must first use the court form HC-001: Petition for Habeas Corpus. In the claim, describe the RJA violation in detail as well as grounds for relief. It is important to state that you are requesting an attorney. Make sure to include supporting documents and file with the court clerk in your county of conviction. The court will assign an attorney for a hearing or deny your claim within 45 days. If serving a capital sentence, there are special rules imposed by Proposition 66 that could cause potential risks with filing an RJA petition.

After sharing all of the above information about the RJA, the discussion turned to resentencing which allows courts to review and potentially reduce sentences when continued incarceration is no longer in the interest of justice. Resentencing can happen in two possible ways, CDCR-initiated or DA-initiated. CDCR can refer an individual who meets the specific criteria for resentencing. California also implemented a pilot program that allocated funding to certain counties for the District Attorney's Office to initiate IP resentencing. You can ask someone outside to check your county's website to see if they are a part of this pilot program.

At the end, the workshop opened to questions and concerns. All our guests could see the frustration and discouragement with the complexity and pace of the justice system. They closed with a supportive message to remain patient and continue to fight. We can't see it from within these walls, but there are so many people out there fighting and advocating for us. Know you are not alone or forgotten.

This workshop was jammed packed full of information which won't all fit in this article. Other bills and penal codes were discussed, like Penal Codes 1172.2 and 1172.6, SB260, AB333, AB600, AB2483, and more. If you missed the workshop, you can write to the Ella Baker Center with questions or resource requests at:

Ella Baker Center
1419 34th Avenue, Suite 202
Oakland, CA 94601
email: policy@ellabakercenter.org

Commutation & Recall of Sentence (C&R) Recommendation Regulations Update

(courtesy of the Ella Baker Center)

Summary: The Board of Parole Hearings has proposed new regulations that would create a systematic process to evaluate people who have served at least 25 years in prison and who have not already become eligible for parole (with certain exceptions) to decide whether or not to recommend them for commutation and resentencing.

This would significantly change how commutations (sentence reductions by the Governor) and recall of sentences (resentencing by a court) are handled for many people. Under the new system, instead of commutations or resentencing being granted case-by-case basis and then usually sent back to the parole board for a release decision, the Board would systematically conduct risk evaluations and hearings up front to decide if a person no longer poses an unreasonable risk to the public and should be released.

If the Board makes a positive recommendation, the Governor or court could act directly on that recommendation to grant release, without requiring another parole hearing afterward. These regulations would take up to ten years to fully implement.

Public Comment: These proposed regulations are currently pending and members of the public (including incarcerated people) may submit public comment. Any person may submit written comments about the proposed regulations by mail to the Board of Parole Hearings, Legal Division at P.O. Box 4036, Sacramento, CA 95812-4036. All written comments must be received or postmarked no later than midnight on October 21, 2025.

To access the proposed regulations:

Go to the Law Library app on our GTL tablet > tap Primary Law on the left column > Administrative Codes and Regulations > tap the subheading California Regulatory Law Bulletin > tap 2025, then navigate to September 5 > tap Board of Parole Hearings Regulations > BPH RN 25-01 (THESE ARE THE REGULATIONS!)

Want to submit a bill, law, or legal issue?
Send your request to *The Razor Wire* @
Room 23, North Education Building

CJCR v. CDCR Lawsuit Regarding Proposition 57 Credits Update

(courtesy of ARC, Bridges of Hope CA, EBC, Initiate Justice, Prison Law Office, and UnCommon Law)

On July 28, 2025, there was an appellate court decision about the application of Prop 57 credits.

The Good News: The Court affirmed that CDCR does have the authority to continue to award additional credits to people serving **determinate** (non-life) sentences which can advance their Earliest Possible Release Dates (EPRDs).

The Bad News: The Court also affirmed that Prop 57 does not give CDCR the authority to apply its enhanced credit-earning regulations to advance Minimum Eligible Parole Dates (MEPDs) for most people with **indeterminate** life sentences, unless already-existing statutes allow. Or, put another way, the Court found that MEPDs cannot be advanced by Prop 57 credits if there are other applicable laws that prevent advancing MEPDs, such as Penal Code section 190, which pertains to people with murder convictions. The Court found that there is a difference between CDCR awarding Prop 57 credits and actually applying those credits to advance MEPDs otherwise ineligible for advancement.

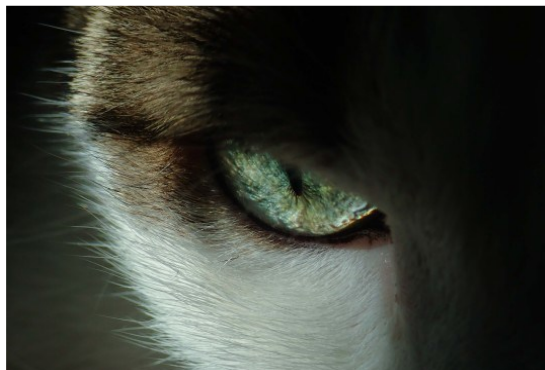
These organizations have reached out to the Attorney General's Office for additional information particularly regarding whether the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) will continue scheduling hearings based on Prop 57 MEPDs for those impacted by the ruling.

What's Next: CDCR and the CJLF can request review by the California Supreme Court. It will be at least several months before we will know whether the Court decides to review any issues in the case. If the Court does grant review, it could be a year or more before the Court reaches a decision.

Please know the fight does not stop here. Advocates throughout the state are working on resentencing, legislation - AB 622 (authored by Assemblymember Kalra), and other legal efforts to help bring justice to people who remain in custody due to this litigation.

SUBMISSIONS

Perspecti'VE SEEN RIGHT THROUGH YOU [LOOK AT ME NOW] by Carmouché



(Come With Me)
Hail Mary
Please,

(Run Quick See)
1.) Turn That HURT INTO HUSTLE
2.) Turn That PAIN INTO PAPER
What Angle? Do We Have Here Now...
From Stabbing Me Back To The Front
I Cannot Help To Spot Your Front
I See Your Vices/I See You All In My Bizz
I'm Like/My Perspective Is:
The Price Is
I Can Easily Forget What Nice IS
I Can Easily Get Caught Up In A Crisis

DO NOT

Allow Fake Style To Blind You
DO NOT
Allow A Fake Smile To Out Grind You
Once I Enter The Room/ I Light Up The Gloom
I Know Now: All My Haters Are Feelin' Doomed
Your Envy Is **So** Evident/Like/Your Ultimate Demise
Call It/*Perspective*/I Can See It In Your Eyes
Shinin' Brighter Than Diamonds
~SURPRISE~

*When I Serve 'Em Back Their Own Medicine/Little Do They
Know*

*It Is On Their Own Preemptive Platter/Now I Watch 'Em All
Scatter*

My Soul Is/ So Compiled/So Many Different *Perspectives*
(Seen It All?)
Or Perhaps...

(Just Seen Enough)
The Things I **Look Forward** Too:
Are Free.

While Most Haterz Are Too Busy **LOOKING** At Me.
With My Brown Eyes
I See All Your Brown Noses

I Need Proof That You Are **Solid & Not** See Through:
~LOOK AT ME NOW~

Pushed Me Off The Edge
Pass Signs For Parachutes Sold
At The Bottom/Lies The Problem
Where There Is Only Madness/ No Mad Dash To Solve Them
This Is Rock Bottom
Even Bikini Bottom/I'm Ready/I'm Ready/I'm Ready/To Ele-
vate/Evolve Past The Hate

Towards That TimeLine Where I Can Relate

HATERZ SCREAMIN':

(**"SHE DOESN'T EVEN GO HERE"**)
Yet Still/I'm Here/Parked Outside
I Pulled Up With My Ceiling Missing
Bass So Turnt/The Decibels Scour Your Senses
Guess My Light Made Your Demons Want To Fight
Let Us Talk About *This Glass*
Half Full or Is It Half Empty
Personally/I Am Just The Sources Plug
Stylish As The One Who Sent Me
He Sent Me Not To Judge The Glass
Or The Class
Alas,
To Have A Glass
(It Is All About Perspective).

SUBMISSIONS

Sidewalks

by Elijah Leon

I walk silently, but my thoughts are so loud
cracked sidewalks, visual pain I see above ground
I walk silently, I walk vividly
I see them running in circles
unhealthy dirt tracks, unhealthy minds
relentlessly trying to...
getting nowhere
cold concrete faces, tear stained traces
dripping pain tar goes...
down running legs with each step taken
endless deep rooted seeds
filled mazes of sorrow
hoping to see a better tomorrow
years of shame
sealing an unseen fate
cracked, uneven, unbalanced sidewalks
walking broken
hurting and lost
I catch my balance
as I trip over, unaware pain of someone's
what's broken inside
unappreciated, unwanted, unaware steps
to feel the visibility of chaos
is uncomfortable vibrations of...
insecurity — I know
yet what's happening goes
unnoticed... but... "I" see them
I wonder what happened in their life's story
Hey, watch out for the crack!
I fell there before!

Broken sidewalks
walking broken
no one sees the unseen
no one cares what's lost
I walk silently but
Inside
Inside, I want to scream
This is not dream.

I see "once me"

Liberated

by Jessicah Cowan

I want complete Freedom
and not just freedom solely of mind.
I want absolute liberation.
With all senses.

I want the contradiction of granite
against a silken blossom under the spring sun.
I want sharp, blinding euphoria,
I want the absence of this desert nothingness.
I want perennial currents
that quench my necrotic isms.
I want the summer's warmth that leaves chills.
I want this lifeless pulse to mirror the leaves of fall
and reverberate like a tumbling boulder.
I want the tremulous volcanic eruption
that silences the Earth.
I want the fervor of blurring clarity
that ripples from the core.
I want the shiverous exhale of winter's last storm
that ends in enervation.
I want the lingering taste
that evokes the thunderous jolt of a lightning's strike.
I want the wondrous scent
that draws a provocative invocation
of every season.
Absolute.
Liberation.

On Dirt

by Elsa Thompson

as I flick a dead fly from the edge of my milk carton
I marvel at the mop lines arching across the chow hall floor
Gray-brown streaks of a.m. efforts
The satisfying parabolas nestled parallel to one another
exhausted mops dragged
by equally exhausted inmates

and I think upon those who have been promised
a chance to never leave this place
scrubbing their knuckles open each 4 a.m.
scouring with sanitary pads and shining with stolen wax
a fevered prayer to ward away
the muddy prints of military boots
a [ritual] to assert their status, their dominion, their power
over these linoleum tiles

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for Women**

Warden

Lavelle Parker

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NEWSLETTER STAFF

Administrative Editor

AW Delinia Lewis

Supervising Editor

Dean Palacios, CalPIA

Resident Editors

Grace Coleman

Aimee Gana

Paige Linville

Kinzle Noordman

Logo Design

Miccal Martinez

Contributors

Koi Bagnerise

Stacey Barker

Carmouché

Jessicah Cowan

Monica Diaz

Rebecca Grossman

Stephanie Lazarus

Elijah Leon

Trang Luu

Monica McCarrick

Elsa Thompson

Stacy Walker

Photography

Media Center

CRM

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

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

Would 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.

ReEvolution Offers a New Perspective

by Grace Coleman

Remix. Reenter. Restore. ReEvolution is a space providing restoration and comfort to residents in prison throughout California. Together, Barbara, A.K., Howard, and Victoria, are just a few of many life-changing humans who bring their non-profit organization into the hearts of incarcerated people across the state. The ReEvolution team brings in an abundance of true humanity and wisdom, so we can unleash our true selves and live freely. ReEvolution revolutionizes the way we see the world around us, by offering transforming perspectives and offering connections we never saw coming.

This past summer, ReEvolution held their annual celebration ceremony for individuals who have completed the year long series of restorative workshops. In honor of the graduates, Barbara brought in long-time friend and Forbes-featured health and wellness guru, Rosie Acosta. Growing up on the streets of East LA, Rosie stepped into our sacred circle as a relatable, yet admirable, soul-searching sister. Rosie introduced us into her own headspace by prompting a question: what is compassion?

In order to have compassion, we are moving through life finding ways to carry calmness into human suffering. So, why do so many mindful meditation practices ask us to invite in self-compassion? Rosie admits how seemingly easy it has been for her to have compassion for others her entire life. As a result of a childhood upbringing full of family dysfunction, petty theft, and street violence, Rosie developed strong roots of unworthiness and shame that caused her to struggle with authentically practicing the act of loving herself. To develop self-compassion, we have to learn how to bring peace into our own suffering and practice what it means to be radically loved.

Today, Rosie is the author of the inspirational self-help read, *Radically Loved*, in which she courageously shares her life story as a guide to loving ourselves. With self love, we can understand, "We live in a world that is constantly being threatened by scarcity, hate, and division, forces that separate us from the truth we all know: we are radically loved." As an instructor on top-rated app Headspace, Rosie utilizes her calming presence into the hearts of people's homes all over the world. She has come to face her ugly truths by moving towards, "a deeper acceptance," of who she is, "without needing to pretend to be someone," she's not. Rosie tells us how she realized, "I couldn't change who I was, where I came from, but I could change what I believed about myself and the world." Through being the change we wish to see in the world, we choose to no longer believe we are in a system designed to keep us from thriving. We can decide to embrace the uniqueness of our life path, and live a radically loved life.

ReEvolution offers victim impact, restorative justice, and trauma healing workshops. The group will be back again to kick off another cohort on the last Saturday of the month: October 25th. Submit a 2016 Form to come join us to remix your life and meet a better version of you.