

ARTS-IN-CORRECTIONS

program

A partnership of the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

BENEFITS OF ARTS-IN-CORRECTIONS

Studies and evaluation indicate that Arts-in-Corrections programs have a wide range of positive impacts on inmate behavior and prison environments, including the following:

- ▶ building positive relationships
- ▶ encouraging healthy behaviors
- ▶ bridging cultural differences
- ▶ improving inmate relations
- ▶ reducing inmate-staff conflict
- ▶ improving family relationships
- ▶ increasing critical thinking
- ▶ building real-world job skills



“The Arts-in-Corrections class helps us experience the emotions of anger, fear and sadness. I used to bottle everything up. I was a walking time bomb. Now we are training our emotions.”

“I care about everyone now. That’s what it’s done for me. I don’t need this program to get out of prison – I need this program to stay out of prison.”



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Arts-in-Corrections programs currently offer an array of performing, literary and visual arts disciplines, such as theater, music, creative writing, poetry, painting, drawing and sculpture for eligible CDCR inmates. Arts-in-Corrections programming is provided by professional artists – individuals who have actively participated in their particular arts discipline and who are trained to work in correctional settings.

Since launching as a pilot program in 2014, California's Arts-in-Corrections program has reached more than 2,000 inmates at 19 CDCR facilities. In 2017, the program will be offered in all 34 CDCR adult institutions.



“The initial reports I’ve received have been outstanding. The inmates were excited and represented all ethnicities, sexual orientations and varying criminal backgrounds. The Captain and supervisors on the facility all had great things to report and said the inmates were totally invested in the process. Three of the former STG inmates said today the class has helped them openly express their feelings and work together as a team.”

– Warden, Kern Valley State Prison



“I see changes in the guys' attitudes. They are more outgoing. They now go up and talk to people. They intermingle more. It really makes a big change in the guys.”

– Correctional Officer, Ironwood State Prison

“The Arts-in-Corrections program has had a positive effect on the inmate participants. With incarceration, most inmates only exhibit anger or try and hide their feelings. This program teaches inmates to exhibit laughter, happiness, sadness, anger, and helps them get in touch with feelings rarely exhibited. I personally have seen inmates of all ethnicities work together, and put aside their differences and perform as a tight group. This program allows the inmate participants to step outside themselves, look within, and see potential they didn't think they had.”

– Associate Warden, California Institution for Women

“Embedded in traditional arts practices are processes that lead us to community. In this way, traditional arts are not only outlets but vehicles that can afford the students spiritual, intellectual, and emotional mobility in an otherwise immobile environment. Each day I left the prison needing to make sense of my time spent with these men. Why was it so easy to connect? Each session seemingly created new connections. Each connection gave path to new possibilities. Each possibility, hope. Where there is hope, there is a sense of belonging.”

– Guitarist, Arts in Corrections Provider at CSP Corcoran



“The Actors’ Gang program helped me figure out what I want to do with my life; and bettering myself and how I react to situations. I don’t always have to blow up, I don’t always have to stuff it away. There’s a way to express it. Yes, I committed a crime, I made a mistake, but I know that’s not who I am.”

– Inmate Participant, California Institution for Women



“I’m in the Native American beadwork class. I’m Native American. This class has been wonderful. It has taught me patience; it has taught me to be more aware that there are things other than violence in this world. I’m suffering through Bell’s Palsy and this class is showing me that not everything is as bad as it seems. I don’t know what I would have done without this class, without these good instructors. I made some projects and it took a lot of concentration with one eyeball, you know? But I did it. I just want to thank you. I want to thank you guys so much for giving us an opportunity to be creative.”

– Inmate Participant, Valley State Prison (Chowchilla)



EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMING

Through the Arts-in-Corrections programs, local nonprofit arts organizations coordinate a wide array of arts programming led by professional artists. The following is a sample of current programming:

Theater

The Actors' Gang, under the leadership of Artistic Director Tim Robbins, provides theater arts programming with an emphasis on Commedia dell'arte techniques.

Traditional Arts

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts promotes and supports ways for cultural traditions to thrive now and into the future through the arts. Master teaching artists of traditional expressions provide residencies Arts-in-Corrections programming in Mexican jarocho music and verse composition, Native American beadwork, African American storytelling, songwriting, and African drumming, Chicano poetry, and/or other traditional arts disciplines.

Shakespeare

Marin Shakespeare Company's successful classes focus on the creation of original autobiographical theater pieces written and performed by inmates, inspired by themes chosen from Shakespeare.

Creative Writing

InsideOUT uses creative writing as a catalyst for personal transformation and has worked in numerous correctional institutions in southern California. Professional creative writing experts provide creative writing and literary arts programming.

Music

Dance Kaiso provides residencies in Afro-Caribbean dance. Teaching artists conduct Caribbean drum/percussion and dance classes taught in a geographical, historical, and cultural context, culminating in a final presentation.

Visual Art

Project PAINT provides an opportunity for inmates to create collaborative projects through visual arts and fine crafts workshops led by professional artists.



“This class has brought down barriers that I have had with these men I have been thrown in with. I look at all of them differently now. Friendships have arisen in places I would never before have attempted.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the California Arts Council, a state agency dedicated to advancing California through the arts and creativity.

Craig Watson, Director
craig.watson@arts.ca.gov

Ayanna Kiburi, Deputy Director
ayanna.kiburi@arts.ca.gov

Photos by Peter Merts

