

**California Lawyers for the Arts and the William James Association  
in collaboration with the University of San Francisco**

*presented*

**Arts in Corrections: Opportunities for Justice and Rehabilitation**

*a national conference*

**June 16 – 20, 2015**

**San Francisco, CA**

*with the support of*

The National Endowment for the Arts  
The California Arts Council  
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
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USF School of Arts and Humanities  
USF School of Management  
International Institute of Criminal Justice Leadership  
USF President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women  
San Francisco Association of Realtors

# **Arts in Corrections: Opportunities for Justice and Rehabilitation**

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **Summary**

California Lawyers for the Arts and the William James Association, in collaboration with the University of San Francisco, presented the national conference, “Arts In Corrections: Opportunities for Justice and Rehabilitation.” June 16 to 19, 2015. The conference showcased best practices in the field, reviewed current research models and results, and offered insights into new developments and challenges. A total of 222 persons participated, representing 22 states and two foreign countries--England and Japan.

### **California Context**

Starting in 2012, California Lawyers for the Arts and the William James Association created a demonstration project with the support of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), the California Arts Council (CAC) and several private foundations. Dr. Larry Brewster of the University of San Francisco designed pre-and-post surveys that were administered to inmates participating in arts programs in four state prisons and two county jails. Qualitative and quantitative evidence showed positive impacts on inmates’ behavior, self-esteem and interest in learning, among other benefits, and led to an initial two-year, \$2.5 million pilot program funded by CDCR as an inter-agency contract with the CAC. The pilot program, which started in 2014, initially provided arts classes in 18 state prisons. The quick expansion of arts-in-corrections programs, which had relied for several years on private philanthropy and volunteer support, prompted the need to create a learning community that would exchange best practices from across the nation.

### **Conference Goals and Agenda**

While sharing our successful strategies with practitioners and arts leaders from across the nation, we planned that the conference would provide a deep orientation and training models for artists and arts administrators from California and elsewhere who are new to the field. Having realized the value of evidence-based research in California, an important emphasis of this conference was the importance of evaluation as a necessary strategy to build the case for arts programs in correctional settings. The agenda also covered funding models, strategic planning issues for organizations, advocacy and a look at successful national models for strengthening the field.

The conference began with a full day of training on June 15, 2015 that provided the opportunity to learn from experienced practitioners in a variety of art disciplines. The day featured two plenary panels, one on the nuts and bolts of working in prison and the other on the culture and curricula of prison arts programs. At the end of the training portion of the conference, we scheduled the first of two facilitated discussions on the merits and next steps of forming a national arts in corrections coalition. The two coalition building sessions were attended by more than 40 participants. This group formed a national steering committee and is continuing to work together to shape the goals and structure of a national prison arts coalition.

In all, the conference featured 77 presenters and speakers and 12 facilitated breakout sessions that encouraged networking opportunities within participants' respective arts disciplines. Three plenary panels were organized and moderated by Beth Bienvenu, Accessibility Director at the National Endowment for the Arts; Jim Carlson, a former Arts-In-Corrections Program Manager and Artist Facilitator of the New Folsom Prison in California; and Dr. Lawrence Brewster, a Professor of Public Administration at the University of San Francisco, who has 30 years of experience in arts in corrections evaluative research. One panel featured formerly incarcerated arts in corrections program graduates, all of whom are still practicing in their respective art disciplines.

Additional workshop sessions focused on evaluative methods, criminal justice reform, re-entry issues, restorative justice models, legislative and administrative advocacy, transitional programs and entrepreneurial activities as well as outreach and public awareness. Various music, theater, and poetry performances were included, as well as an installation, "Barrios Unidos' Prison Cell" in the university plaza. In addition, a number of organizations and artists shared short documentaries and art films that were shown in a dedicated screening room.

A reception sponsored by our San Francisco Host Committee was held on June 17 for conference participants. USF President Father Paul Fitzgerald, S.J. and Dr. Mary Wardell Ghirarduzzi, USF Vice Provost spoke, along with Tom Decaigny, Director, San Francisco Arts Commission; and Actor Peter Coyote, who served as the second Chairman of the California Arts Council.

On the final morning, Alma Robinson, Executive Director of California Lawyers of the Arts, facilitated a discussion about future opportunities with Millicent Tidwell, Director of Programs at California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Craig Watson, Director of the California Arts Council.

The conference ended with a trip to San Quentin Prison, where various art programs were showcased. Conference participants were treated to a visual arts show, poetry readings, and performances by the San Quentin Artistic Ensemble and Marin Shakespeare. Group discussions were held with San Quentin arts participants. One participant commented, "Incredible! Profoundly inspiring!!"

## **Participants' Evaluations**

Highlights from participants' written evaluations (completed by 64 of the 222 participants) are summarized as follows:

Nearly all who attended (96%) ranked the San Quentin trip as an excellent experience. The most well received panel was on criminal justice reform, garnering a positive response rate of 92%.

The plenary session on research and evaluation that was led by Dr. Larry Brewster was rated by 82.5% of the respondents as excellent or very good.

Wayne Kramer of Jail Guitar Doors, our keynote speaker, was the most attended speaker of the conference; nearly 94% of respondents rated his address as excellent or very good. A one-woman theatrical performance by Leah Joki, a Julliard alumna who spent more than 20 years teaching acting classes in prison, was very well received with 92% excellent or very good responses. And the musical performance by the Marcus Shelby Trio had an excellent response rate of more than 96%.

Participants of the conference had various objectives in attending the conference, including networking (47%), gathering information (39%), involvement (11%), and support for already existing programming (3%); 96% felt that their objective at the onset of the conference was ultimately met or exceeded. One participant responded on her evaluation form: "One of the best conferences I've ever been to!"

Months after the conference, we continued to receive letters of thanks, such as this recent email from Agnes Wilcox, founder of Prison Performing Arts in Missouri, "I was inspired by the conference and still hold it in my heart. I was afraid that when all the "dinosaurs" retired, as I have, the work would cease. Seeing all the young people at the conference showed me that we have built a field, and the next generations are as excited about it as I am. That gives me great joy. Thank you for all your work on the conference, and for all that you do for California prisoners."

## **Funding Sources**

Funds for various conference costs were obtained from the National Endowment for the Arts, San Francisco Foundation, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Quentin Hancock Fund, the Andy Warhol Foundation and the San Francisco Association of Realtors. In addition, we received financial and in-kind support from several programs at the University of San Francisco, including the USF Office of Diversity - Engagement and Community Outreach, Jesuit Foundation, Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought, USF School of Arts and Humanities, USF School of

Management, the International Institute of Criminal Justice Leadership, and the USF President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women.

Funding from the California Department of Corrections and the California Arts Council to the William James Association for training provided additional assistance for conference costs, including conference fees and travel for out of town presenters.

### **Next Steps**

Every respondent of our evaluation was in agreement that there should be additional conferences on arts in corrections, with 75% stating that this conference should take place annually and 20% stating that it should take place at least every two years. Based on this feedback, California Lawyers for the Arts has received NEA funding for a second conference in 2017.

The National Steering Committee has met several times since the conference and is currently researching other similar organizational structures and collecting feedback from individuals and organizations in the sector. We have also hired a consultant to investigate the feasibility of a national support organization for artists and arts organizations who work in this field.

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