

**CALIFORNIA ART FOR JUSTICE FORUM
OCTOBER 16, 2018
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY - SACRAMENTO**

FINAL REPORT

The California Art for Justice Forum was presented by California Lawyers for the Arts (CLA), in collaboration with California State University Sacramento (CSUS) and the Williams James Association (WJA), and was hosted by California State University Sacramento at their Alumni Center on October 16, 2018. This was the fifth of six Forums taking place nationally. Previous Forums were held in Michigan, Texas, Georgia, and Alabama with the final Forum held in New York in November of 2018.

The theme of the California Forum was “Addressing Mass Incarceration and Criminal Justice Reform through the Arts.”

California Forum Planning Committee and Process

Organized and facilitated by California Lawyers for the Arts, the planning committee consisted of staff representing major arts and social justice organizations, the CSUS Colleges of Arts and Letters and Health and Human Services and the California Arts Council, a state agency. The committee met monthly beginning in July 2018 by phone and in person hosted by the CSUS College of Arts and Letters. In addition, an Executive Committee consisting of the CLA team, William James Association and CSUS met bi-weekly. Decisions were made as to the format of the event, number and topics for panels, topics and number of breakout sessions, and suggestions for names of individual panelists with the follow-up detail work accomplished by the CLA team. The committee also assisted in marketing the Forum by sending invitations to their constituents.

Forum Format

The event was scheduled for one day from 9 -5 in the CSUS Alumni Center located on the CSUS campus. All the activities took place in a single large room. The day began with a light breakfast and welcome remarks followed by former Sacramento Poet Laureate Bob D. Stanley reading from a recently published book by an incarcerated poet. Morning and afternoon panels with Q & A, were each followed by a facilitated breakout session. A networking lunch was followed by a keynote speaker, Luis Rodriguez, who is a published poet and author and returned citizen. A reception featuring live music performed by a professional musical quartet of returned citizen completed the day.

Highlights

1—The morning panel included two elected officials, a returned citizen, the Director of Rehabilitative Programs of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Deputy Director of the California Arts Council. The afternoon panel also included Dr Larry Brewster, the author of the most current statistical study demonstrating the importance of the arts in reducing recidivism and preparing returned citizens for re-entry. Each panel was moderated by an experienced moderator who was also able to contribute to the discussion because of their expertise.

2--There were four breakout sessions, each of which was facilitated by a CLA trained facilitator accompanied by a scribe whose purpose was to record attendance and take notes on the discussion.

Each of the four discussion topics included invited experts who engaged the attendees and shared their experiences in the field.

3-- The notes taken by the scribes were later transcribed by CLA staff and provide some details about the issues that concerned the attendees and participants of the breakout sessions, their suggestions for solving problems and their interest in continuing the dialogues that were begun at the breakouts. In many instances, the panelists participated in the breakout sessions.

4-- We were fortunate to have legislators representing both political parties participate on the panels and indicate their continuing support for programs that could reduce recidivism and mass incarceration.

5-- The Q & A was of great importance to the attendees, some of whom were returned citizens. There was not enough time to hear all the questions of the attendees lined up at the floor microphone, but many did have a chance to speak and be heard.

6--Of greatest interest were the presentations of returned citizens, which included personal stories, poems, music, and opinions, all validating the importance of the arts in restoring their humanity and ability to return to society.

7--150 individuals attended the Forum

Next Steps

Prison to School Pipeline

- Degree programs and counseling to complete the degree;
- Prison Art programs that result in college credit

How Can Art Be Useful for Success in Re-entry?

- Utilize art to create strong family and community bonds -- e.g. Pen pal/writing exchange programs between inmates and youth, family on the outside
- Collaborations with organizations such as Wounded Warriors.
- Provide opportunities for formerly incarcerated to share their art and be paid
- Encouraging and supportive prison guards would be instrumental
- Art programs give formerly incarcerated people a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves

Art Programming in our County Jails

- Need to find funding to start and sustain County Jails programs
- Develop an artist fellowship opportunity program
- Develop artist-facilitator advocates inside county jails
- Collaborations with large arts organizations ie Mondavi Center
- Partnerships between jails and theatres or art galleries
- Offer classes in college art departments on Art in Corrections
- Each county representative should write a letter to their state senator expressing why arts programs in the county jails are important

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

- Provide funding for more arts programs in schools and in cultural and religious organizations
- Advocate for legislation to support arts resources in schools
- Train strong artists with teaching skills to work in community programs and Juvenile corrections
- Support ensuring “Arts for Any Given Child”
- Need more research and data on the impact of the arts

Research, Program Development and Evaluation

- Funding is needed for evaluation; quantitative data is most important
- Don't undervalue qualitative evaluation. The “Good Lives” Model is financially persuasive.
- Blend Pre and Post Data. Also include in-depth interviews
- Students can help with evaluation and studies
- There is value in cross-cultural research
- Interview teaching artists-pre and post evaluations
- Self evaluations
- Have a robust needs assessment

How Can Artists Impact Racial Disparity?

- Mentoring programs by artists during incarceration and upon reentry
- Artists are able to foster empathy by using their art to make an emotional connection and change
- Art lowers defenses towards controversial issues and promotes open mindedness

What Can Artists Do to Generate Public Awareness?

- Change public perceptions
- Hold more trainings within the prison system to change the culture of prison workers
- Thru the inmate-artist we can inform the public that those inside are human and humanize the inmates too
- Artists become mentors for the inmate-artist and those re-entering society
- Restorative Justice Community Arts projects

Prevention, Intervention and Rehabilitation with Juveniles

- Hold more trainings within CA prison system to change the culture of prison workers-change perceptions inside
- More overlap between universities and correctional facilities
- More integration with county education programs providing credit for incarcerated students/something tangible to use when released/re-entry

Q and A Session with the Audience and Speakers

Q. How do we support each other to keep the momentum going?

How can these groups come together again?

A. Create a network to connect the participating groups and resources.

Q. How do we make sure at-risk kids get resources?

A. Create a resource list for existing programs addressing intervention and prevention for juveniles.

A. Create an art app to share resources.

Q. What are the opportunities for those re-entering the system to get involved with the arts?

A. Create an app for opportunities to connect with the arts.

A. Hold a Forum for formerly incarcerated artists to share their ideas and experiences

A. Build Community partnerships

A. Garden projects, Murals

A. Multi-generational solutions

Evaluations

- We received a total of 47 completed written evaluations from participants.
- 95% of respondents (37 out of 39) said their objectives for attending the Forum were met.
- 93% (38 out of 41) rated their satisfaction with the plenary panel speakers as excellent or very good.
- 90% (37 out of 41) rated the keynote address by Luis Rodriguez as excellent, while 5% rated it as very good (2 out of 41).
- 81% (56 out of 69 responses) ranked the discussions during the breakout sessions as excellent or very good.

When asked what was the most valuable part of the Forum, a CDCR representative stated “so many well-spoken, deep and thought provoking speakers,” while another participant wrote, “hearing from ex-inmates about their rehabilitation and reintegration.” One respondent said that a useful resource “would be a list of attendees with the programs they represent and contact information” and another suggested, “create a platform for conversations to continue for teaching artists and administrators to seek help and get information.”

After the conference, Kenneth E. Hartman, a returned citizen, worked with project consultant Jacqueline Trescott to complete an article describing the forum. His piece, “It’s a start, but we’ve got a long way to go, still,” was posted as a blog on the website of the Justice Arts Coalition: <https://thejusticeartscoalition.org/2018/10/24/its-a-start-but-weve-got-a-ways-to-go-still/>

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This report was written by Ellen Taylor, consultant with California Lawyers for the Arts, with support from Ariel Heinicke of California Lawyers for the Arts.