



**November 16, 2018
Columbia Law School**

FINAL REPORT

The New York Art for Justice Forum was convened on Friday, November 16, 2018 at Columbia Law School, the last of six Forums formed out of a national project funded by the Art for Justice Fund, a five-year initiative created in partnership with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and the Ford Foundation. Each Forum was meant to bring together representatives from government, higher education, corrections, arts and community by giving citizens, teachers, advocates, artists and policy makers space to discuss and explore the role of the arts in addressing mass incarceration and criminal justice reform.

New York Organizing Team

The New York Forum was organized by Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Rehabilitation Through The Arts, and the Kernochan Center for Law, Media and the Arts at Columbia Law School. Staff from these organizations spoke regularly from February through November 2018 to plan logistics and substantive content for the Forum. California Lawyers for the Arts, as the overall administrator of the Forum project, was also involved in this planning. Representatives from the Center for Institutional & Social Change at Columbia Law School, the Drama Club and the New York State Council on the Arts collaborated with the New York organizers to secure speakers and performers for the panels. All organizations promoted the New York Forum to its constituents to build a diverse group of attendees.

Forum Framework

The Forum was hosted at Columbia Law School from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. The program include a keynote address, three plenary sessions in areas of Youth, Arts in Prison, and Arts in Community, as well as follow up breakout sessions on each panel. The Acting Commissioner of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision gave the keynote address. Each panel included discussions between panelists as well as a dialogue with attendees. After the three plenary sessions, attendees participated in one of three breakout sessions - moderated by practitioners in the three areas - to explore points raised on the plenary panels. Attendees reconvened in the main room to provide reports from each breakout group.

In addition to the substantive discussions, there were two musical performances of original work from participants in current In Prison and In Community programs. Attendees also enjoyed artwork from the Confined Arts program associated with the Columbia University Center for Justice.

Attendance at the Forum

A severe snowstorm reduced the 187 individuals registered to attend the Forum to 122, based on in-person registration the day of the Forum.

Forum Panel and Breakout Outcomes

While the three panels focus on different points of the justice system, the role of arts programs was remarkably similar. Arts programs help:

- Humanize justice involved citizens
- Promote safety rather than fear
- Teach communication skills, build agency, encourage positive risk taking
- Heal trauma
- Support building relationships
- Create community.

Challenges include:

- Continuity of programs
- Appropriate facilities and funding
- Legislative support
- Tension between arts as a vocation versus an avocation (although arts teach skills useful in employment, even if not directly applied)
- Inclusion of families and corrections officers.

Some specific points raised in each panel are set out below.

Arts for Justice Involved Youth

- Holistic approach to creating opportunities for justice involved youth, including internship placement and inclusion of past participants
- Creating safe spaces
- Trauma is intergenerational; lives in the body
- Healing trauma by building resiliency - ask "what happened" not "what's wrong with you"
- Staff have also experienced trauma
- Humanization through change in language from "ward" "defendant" "unfits"
- Build authentic personal relationships through consistency, willingness to be vulnerable
- Stop treating children as adults with expectations to "get a job", holding children to adult standards
- Continuity challenging because of inability to track children when they leave programs and gaps between agencies
- Including family promotes positive expectations
- Including corrections staff helps transform their view of youth
- To strengthen and empower youth, we have to strengthen families; youth return to survival mode when they return to their environment
- Secure detention – no privacy, unable to heal
- Young people need to have leadership positions; sometimes, adults need to get out of their way

Arts in Prison

- What is purpose of arts programming
 - Teach process to reach goals through preparing and presenting performances
 - Teach communication skills, critical listening, build relationships
 - Arts programs create equal exchange between volunteers and incarcerated persons; build trust and vulnerability
 - New ways of thinking to approach life generally - think differently, act differently, achieve different results inside and outside walls
 - Build confidence
 - Promotes family connection through positive interaction
 - Arts as vocation versus rehabilitation – provide legitimate job prospects; teach back of house skills; possible paid internships for returning citizens
 - Helps maintain a connection to the outside
- Engage lawmakers and influence policy by creating work from the stories of incarcerated people
- System challenges
 - Non profits gaining access to the prison population
 - Involving corrections officers in the arts programs to promote relationships
 - Finding appropriate space in corrections facilities
 - Managing constant facility transitions- must maximize time available
 - Involving families in arts programs (e.g. attending performances)

Arts in Community

- Humanization through change of justice system; change the language
- Art can explain history of incarcerated citizens
 - Challenge to not exploit the story for own purposes
 - Defining the role of the artist
 - Pay returning citizens for their artistic work
- Meet returning citizens where they are, i.e., struggling to survive with multi-issue concerns
- Don't legislate from a place of privilege
- Challenge to provide continuity of arts programs given legal restrictions for contact
- Access to art therapy

Outcomes

- Attendees were enthusiastic about elevating arts in corrections to a mainstream movement through a national association and marketing campaign. Staff of the Art for Justice Fund subsequently expressed interest in this initiative.
- Rehabilitation Through The Arts is working with CLA and the NYS Council on the Arts on a proposal to pilot the expansion of arts programs to additional NYS prisons. This emerged from the presence of RTA, the NYS DOCCS Commissioner, a representative from the NYS Budget Office, NYSCA and Alma Robinson of CLA.
- Built a sense of community between a broad base of non-profits and practitioners

- A representative from the NYS Assembly, former chair of the Corrections Committee, indicated he would support legislative funding.
- RTA was approached by various individuals and organizations about possible collaborations, including Columbia Law School, NYC Department of Correction and Shining Light Ministries, which serves Pennsylvania state prisons.

Evaluation of the Forum

- We received a total of 36 completed evaluations from the New York Forum.
- 89% (31 out of 35 respondents) said their objectives for attending the Forum were met.
- 82% (27 out of 33) rated the keynote presentation by Anthony J. Annucci as excellent or very good.
- 60% (62 out of 104 responses) ranked the plenary panels as excellent, while 31% ranked the panels as very good.
- 76% (22 out of 29) rated the discussions during the breakout sessions as excellent or very good.

A University of Cambridge professor said the most valuable part of the Forum was “the integrated nature of the discussion - I came from the American Criminology Society Conference & found the forum more personalized, "in-touch" & connected across topics. i.e. more impactful.” One respondent suggested, “I would love to see the issue of criminal justice reform - which admittedly is huge - or even Arts in Criminal Justice reform to develop and work a sustained message of implementation. Strategy akin to the national gay marriage movement - a coordinated campaign to change public perception, change laws, etc. with high-powered PR & corporate strategy.”

After the conference, Philip Hall, a returned citizen, worked with project consultant Jacqueline Trescott to complete an article describing the forum. His piece was posted as a blog on the website of the Justice Arts Coalition:

<https://thejusticeartscoalition.org/2018/12/11/the-2018-new-york-art-for-justice-forum-at-columbia-university/>

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This report was written by Katie Wagner, Executive Director of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, with support from Ariel Heinicke of California Lawyers for the Arts.