

CCWF PAPER TRAIL

AMPLIFYING VOICES • EMPOWERING CHOICES



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VOL. 1, ISSUE 2

CHOWCHILLA, CALIFORNIA 93610

OCTOBER 2024



Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

Dancers offered a moving performance for the "Shoes of the Forgotten" LWOP event.

Photos by Monique Williams

IN THE SHOES OF THE FORGOTTEN

CCWF honors its LWOP community with landmark event

By Brenda Bowers

On Saturday, Aug. 31, 2024, the Life Without The Possibility of Parole (LWOP) community held its first-ever gathering in the gym of the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). The monumental moment was called "Shoes Of The Forgotten."

Around 200 inside and outside participants attended the event. As the outside guests started to trickle in, CCWF residents jumped with excitement, as their longtime friends and former LWOPs entered the door. "I want to be like you when I grow up," LWOP resident Adriana Vasco said, speaking to former LWOP Chyrl Lamar.

The embraces kept coming as the guests arrived. The chatter flowed and everyone moved about, mingling and making introductions, music blared from the speakers. The room was filled with a sense of unity. "I wish we had this type of love and community out there that you guys have in here," said former lifer K.K. Green.

The room exuded hope and second chances, thanks in big part to the unique decorations and displays. The tables were adorned with decorated cloths. Unicorns dancing along the draping sides, representing the unthinkable. Posters hung

along the walls. Created by members of the LWOP community, every poster held its own symbolic meaning tailored to each individual's personality. They gave a small glimpse into the lives of those hoping for a second chance at life.

Outside guests walked about, looking at the posters. Some were emotional and others intrigued. Jesse Vasquez, Executive Director of the Pollen Initiative and CCWF Paper Trail's adviser, captured photos of individuals next to their posters.

As it neared 10 am, emcee and current LWOP LaToya Jenkins gave the first speech, recognizing and thanking the people of the day: the LWOP community. "We are all striving for freedom," Jenkins said. She recognized Mimi Le for her vision for this event to take place. She also thanked former LWOP Kelly Savage-Rodriguez, who now coordinates for California Coalition for Women Prisoners and staff sponsor Roxanne Nichols for the integral part they played in making it happen.

As event organizer Le walked onto the stage, the mic was passed to her.

"My message to all of you guys is that you matter. Look around you and tell the per-

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UNPACKING ACA 8

What the constitutional amendment could mean for CCWF

By Amber Bray

November 5, 2024, is an important day for every person in the United States: it's Election Day. Americans will elect a president, congressional seats will be up for grabs, and every state will vote on laws that will govern multiple aspects of people's lives. In California, a proposal to amend Article 6 of the California Constitution will be on the ballot.

If passed by the voters, Assembly Constitutional Amendment 8 (ACA 8), will eliminate involuntary servitude from the state's constitution. According to ACA 8, "The California Constitution prohibits slavery and prohibits involuntary servitude, except as punishment to a crime... This measure would prohibit the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation... from punishing any incarcerated person for refusing a work assignment."

Slavery has no place in any constitution, nor does invol-

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CCWF joins Boundless Freedom Project's 5K

By Kristin Rossum

On June 22, 2024 - despite intense, triple-digit summer temperatures-140 individuals at CCWF on Facility C participated in a 5K run held in solidarity with the Boundless Freedom Project.

Boundless Freedom Project is a non-profit that offers Buddhist teachings, meditative movement, ethics and mindfulness training to people incarcerated in California. This year, the group organized a "virtual" 5K run called "Strides for Freedom," which invited runners both inside and outside prison to participate no matter where they are, to promote unity, mindfulness and healing for those impacted by incarceration.



Photo by Monique Williams

Race participants show off their registration numbers.

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PUPPIES ON PARADE

Welcome the new PUPS trainees

Healing Hugs

By Simaima Ohuafi

As a current resident at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), I can say with confidence that we are an institution filled with individuals who have faced emotional and mental challenges and/or have survived some form of abuse. This makes it very difficult for most of us to trust others. So, finding an outlet within these walls towards healing is like a miracle. Thankfully, CCWF is focused on providing individuals multiple opportunities to rehabilitating themselves.

Being incarcerated for almost three decades has afforded me the chance to grow through what I go through. While working towards healing from all the trauma I have faced, I learned that I am a hugger. One outlet for healing is hugs. Healing the hearts of the broken and lost souls can be accomplished with a hug.

I love to give hugs to my peers as I greet them. A hug is an act of kindness that many women do without even knowing why. We might hug to show affection, something we lacked or never had, or to trigger positive memories.

One day, I went to give an old-timer a hug, and when we were done embracing, she stated, "Girl, you are one of very few that I give a hug to nowadays."

I smiled, feeling special because I thought she valued me that much in her life that I deserved her hugs. I thanked her and cracked a joke, saying, "Girl, we've been hugging since we've been in diapers."

Then she said something that made me look at things in a totally different way today.

"Maima, it doesn't matter these days if we've been knowing each other for so long," she said. "These females are calling PREA to eliminate you just for living in a room they want for themselves."

This woke a fear in me that I couldn't shake. For my own safety and security, I am forced to reconsider hugging.

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) process was created to ensure incarcerated individuals are not being sexually harassed, abused or violated by staff members or other incarcerated people. It also was intended to ensure incarcerated individuals are treated with dignity and respect. It's important because if a person is free from sexual

abuse, they are able to focus on healing.

But the process has vulnerabilities. My fear is if when I compassionately hug any of my peers, one of them could falsely claim that I assaulted them, resulting in my placement in the Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) pending investigation. For those individuals that choose to weaponize the PREA process, there are no repercussions in place. This is the federal procedure. The institution must follow the federal law even if they know a false allegation is being made. The law is the law, and we'll figure out the rest as we go. What the hell, right?

According to a study published in the research journal Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology, hugging releases oxytocin, a hormone that promotes bonding and positive feelings. Other studies have also shown that hugs can lower blood pressure, reduce the levels of the stress hormone cortisol in our bodies and release tension. Hugs are important in prison, even if they are underrated. Living in a community full of people who have been incarcerated for committing crimes and breaking the law is challenging, and in challenging times, it's important for us to feel closer to each other, rather than more distant or isolated.

Many individuals incarcerated at CCWF are either victims of rape, molestation, or some sort of sexual abuse. healing through therapeutic groups such as Healing Trauma, Beyond

Incarceration program, etc., individuals learn how to feel safe to hug as an intimate gesture without feeling uncomfortable. It has become contagious in a sort of way.

We need to feel safe hugging a person in need of a hug, showing empathy, support, and understanding without becoming a victim. We need to keep PREA from being utilized for a bad cause. How do we fix it? What can we do to gain the integrity of the PREA process back for those who truly need it?

Hopefully in the future, the "Prison Rape Elimination Act" will be amended to displace and rehouse all parties involved. This could decrease the abuse of the PREA process immensely, if not eliminate it altogether.

Restoring trust in our community is important and we need as many acts of kindness in here as possible. Because healing the hearts of the broken and lost souls can be done with a simple hug.



While
Art by Nora
Igova

CCWF Paper Trail EST. 2024

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CCWF Paper Trail Staff

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Kanoa Harris-Pendang

Managing Editor

Delina Williams

News Editor

Sagal Sadiq

Features Editor

Nora Igova

Art and Layout Designer

Diana Lovejoy

Journalism Guild Chairperson

Administrative Review

Anissa De La Cruz

Warden

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Monique Williams

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A High Cost

Brenda Barerra is one of hundreds losing years of good time credits earned under Prop 57 rollback



Photo by Siam on Adobe Stock

By Kristin Rossum

Imagine you are just days from paroling after being found suitable from a life sentence.

You are waiting for confirmation of your final release date so you can call and let your family know when to pick you up in the parking lot. Then the rug gets pulled out from underneath you. You receive paperwork notifying you that your date has been changed.

Instead of going home some time this week, your release date has been recalculated to a day in 2029. Devastated and in shock, you must call and tell your family that although your parole grant stands, you now owe the state an additional five and a half years before you can parole.

This was the devastating and heartbreaking reality experienced by Brenda Barerra as she navigated the Parole Board process earlier this year.

Barerra was found suitable at her initial parole board hearing on Jan. 5, 2024. Like many incarcerated individuals who are committed to their change and rehabilitation, she participated in many educational and self-help programs.

These programs not only provided opportunities for growth, but under Proposition 57, which passed in November of 2016, allowed incarcerated individuals with indeterminate sentences to earn Rehabilitation Achievement Credits (RAC) and/or Milestone credits that could be applied by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) toward their Minimum Eligible Parole Date (MEPD).

Unfortunately, due to strong and vocal opposition to Proposition 57, a Dec. 13, 2023 ruling and a Jan. 26, 2024 judgment by a Sacramento County Superior Court now prohibits CDCR from releasing on parole an indeterminate sentenced individual whose MEPD date was advanced due to Prop 57 credits.

This ruling is being appealed by CDCR.

Due to this ruling, Barerra lost five and a half years of RAC and milestone credits she had earned through her programming efforts over the years. These years of credits were earned from her participation in self-help classes, college classes, vocational trainings

and more. All – efforts to broaden her mind, provide healing, process trauma and enrich employment opportunities.

Barerra is currently working as a Peer Support Specialist, a job that is a keystone of the California Model and is in high demand in the community. This position required months of special training by Sacramento trained medical staff. And allows her to use her lived experience to help others navigate the medical system, create goals, maintain recovery and receive necessary resources for successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The Parole Board and the governor have already found that Barerra is suitable to re-enter society. Yet, due to the changes to Prop 57, she must stay locked up another five and a half years because the programming credits she earned were rescinded.

I ask you, what is the purpose of this? It is clearly not for rehabilitation. And at what cost? At last check, the state of California is paying \$131,000 a year to house an incarcerated individual. The state will pay a total of approximately \$820,500 to continue to house Barerra in prison for those five and a half years even though she has already been deemed rehabilitated. Can't you imagine a better way to spend such a substantial sum of money?

And Barerra is just one example of an individual impacted by these changes.

Many other incarcerated individuals are going to their initial parole board hearings and are receiving parole grants. Their parole hearing dates are still allowed to be advanced due to Prop 57 credits earned through rehabilitative and educational programs, but the credits are no longer allowed to be applied to their MEPDs.

This injustice must be corrected if CDCR is to live up to its name promising to deliver not only correction but rehabilitation. Once rehabilitation is demonstrated and parole is granted and confirmed by the governor, allow the individual to parole and become the productive member of society that he or she has proven to be.

Anything else is now retribution not rehabilitation.

Recent Court Decision on Proposition 57 Impacts Lifers

By Amber Bray

By now, many life-term individuals across the state of California have heard about changes to Proposition 57 and credits they have earned towards their release dates. What some people may not know is what's true and what's not, and how this affects their chances of going home.

The changes being talked about are a result of a lawsuit filed by a group called Criminal Justice Legal Foundation (CJLF). This group sued the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH). Claiming that CDCR was not authorized to change the penal code in terms of credits granted towards a person's minimum eligible parole date, and that BPH was not authorized to release people on a date that had been advanced by those credits. Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Jennifer K. Rockwell sided with CJLF and made three judgments in favor of the plaintiff. Judge Rockwell then elected to stay (put on hold) two parts of the judgment but let one go into effect while CDCR and BPH appeal the judgment.

The one part of the judgment that has gone into effect sent shockwaves through California prisons and devastated loved ones of those affected. Individuals who have

At CCWF, the number of people affected by this ruling is relatively low at the moment but the impact has been devastating.

been diligently programming and actively engaging in rehabilitative endeavors now have learned that the rehabilitative achievement credits (RAC) and milestone credits will not be applied towards their actual release date once they are found suitable.

To put it differently, CDCR has instructed each institution to apply RAC and milestone credits towards the date an individual actually has a hearing in front of the BPH. But, when the person is found suitable, those credits will be removed from the calculation and the person's actual parole date will be determined.

At CCWF, the number of people affected by this ruling is relatively low at the moment but the impact has been devastating. That devastation will only increase while this case is being litigated in court. Individuals are hearing that they will have to remain in prison for a few additional months to more than five years after being found suitable for parole, depending on the actual length of time served.

The sad fact of the matter is that this case will likely take years to be settled and, absent an injunction or further stay by an appellate court or the California Supreme Court, individuals will continue to earn credits towards a board hearing but those credits will not apply to a parole date.

While none of this is good news or anything a lifer wants to hear, there is one area that many lifers may not have considered: the possibility they could transfer to a minimum custody facility once their parole grant is affirmed by the BPH and governor. Title 15 as well as the Department Operations Manual (DOM) allow for life term individuals to transfer to minimum custody facilities once the parole grant is affirmed provided they meet the criteria to be transferred. (See, e.g., Title 15 § 3375.2(a)(8); DOM 61010.11.5 and 62050.7.3.)

If a lifer is impacted by California Justice Legal Foundation v. California Department of Corrections, et al., and has additional time to serve, s/he may want to speak with their correctional counselor to explore whether a transfer to a different facility may be a better way to serve that time.

FEATURES

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untary servitude, a vestige of slavery. No person should be forced to serve any other person or entity against their will. To paraphrase the Declaration of Independence, these truths should be self-evident.

But let us consider what ACA 8 could mean for incarcerated individuals across the state. CDCR would be prohibited from issuing Rules Violation Reports to anyone who refuses a work assignment. That said, CDCR would not be prohibited from adjusting work groups/privilege groups for those who do not wish to work nor would it be prohibited from awarding credits for those who do want to work. In fact, Assembly Bill 628 specifically calls for CDCR to “develop a voluntary work program and prescribe the rules and regulations regarding work and programming assignments for individuals in facilities operated by the department.”

What does that mean? Title 15 section 3044 defines work groups and privilege groups for incarcerated individuals. People often hear terms like “A1/A” or “C over C” but may not know what they mean. Both things refer to work groups (“A1” or “C”) and privilege groups (“A” and “C”). Work groups and privilege groups outline things like maximum shopping amounts, how many family visits a person can have per year, how many quarterly packages one can receive per year, how often a kiosk can be accessed, etc. Title 15 section 3043 allows for credits to be awarded to those who engage in rehabilitative programs.

CDCR is already contemplating revisions to Title 15 based on the adjustments to the pay scale and changes to the hours people are assigned to jobs.

However, should ACA 8 pass and incarcerated individuals decide they do not wish to work, their work group/privilege group may very well change; they may have fewer privileges than they anticipate. And, importantly, they may not earn the same credits towards their release dates.

Taking a step further back, let’s imagine that many individuals at CCWF decide they do not wish to work. It is well known that most people don’t like working in the kitchen, so let’s imagine many CCWF residents stop working in the culinary department. What happens then? Everyone at CCWF still has to be served two hot meals per day, so who will do those jobs? What we saw during the multiple COVID-19 lockdowns, modifications and quarantines answers that question: the staff will have to do those jobs.

While this sounds like a great solution, the reality won’t be as pleasant. If staff have to do the jobs incarcerated people won’t, dayroom and yard programming will be affected. Delays in serving meals will occur. Groups and events will likely be impacted since staff coverage is mandatory for any programming. In short, life at CCWF will change and probably not for the better.

Incarcerated individuals should understand the ramifications of a decision to work or not to work. Individuals should look at their time at CCWF, or any other facility, as laying the groundwork for their future. Once released, returning citizens will have to be employed in order to support themselves and/or their families. Why not look at working while incarcerated as a good first step towards one’s future?

COVER STORY: BOUNDLESS FREEDOM PROJECT 5K
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Walkers speed along the yard at Facility C (above), including Yajayra Dominguez and Boualy Mangsanghanh (left).

According to Boundless Freedom Project executive director Ayla Benjamin, the event drew more than 615 participants from inside the California state prisons including CCWF, San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, Pelican Bay State Prison, California Men’s Colony and California State Prison Solano. Runners on the outside also participated from locations throughout the United States including California, Minnesota, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Tennessee.

“Seeing the outpouring number of participants, knowing that we all collectively ran together on that particular day, is truly magical,” said Nhut Vo, a Boundless Freedom Project community coordinator and a former LWOP.

“There’s something profoundly moving about the awareness that, under the blue sky across various locations, we were all running together with one spirit to liberate all,” Vo said.

Facility C’s participation was organized by CCWF resident Boualy Mangsanghanh in an effort to help build community and bring greater awareness to the benefits of mindfulness. According to Mangsanghanh, her daily mindfulness practice brings her mental stability and is a part of her healthy lifestyle.

“If you are not mindful, you are not wholly present in the moment,” Mangsanghanh said, and this can always end up costing you in some way. You miss out on life.

The 5K was a resounding success. It was noted that there was not a single alarm on Facility C throughout the entirety of the event.

Facility C Administration Captain Stephen Rodriguez gave his full support to “a virtual event that advances mindfulness, a healthy cause and togetherness.”

Lieutenant Johnathon Cuske attended the event and supported the runners, encouraging their efforts and promoting mindfulness and emotional health. He stated that he was “very happy to see the number of people taking steps to be mindful of how their actions affect themselves, others and their environment around them.”

The sense of connection was important to runners too, like Anna Brown, who said, “knowing I have support and solidarity with my peers allows me a sense of peace.”

COVER STORY: LWOP EVENT
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Photos by CCWF Paper Trail

Participants broke out into groups to discuss their rehabilitation and prison experience.

son next to you that they matter,” Le said, as everyone in the room turned to their neighbor and repeated those words.

Savage-Rodriguez then spoke of the injustices of LWOP sentencing and how she came here in support of her sisters, speaking of the LWOP community. “Until we end this sentence, I can’t just walk away,” Savage-Rodriguez stated before descending from the stage.

Afterward, everyone formed a circle and held hands as Stacey Dyer started off in prayer. “In the blowing of the wind and the chill of the winter, we remember them,” Dyer emotionally stated, speaking of her LWOP sisters that have passed away.

“This is the most important event that could’ve ever occurred in CCWF,” formerly incarcerated Caroline Amaya Robles said, full of emotion. “They deserve it. They need to know that they matter, that they’re loved and that even though I’m not an LWOP, they’re

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COVER STORY: LWOP EVENT
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still my sisters.”
As the day went on, so did the speeches and performances.

The LWOP community performed “Walk Away Joe,” a skit choreographed by Carmel Murphy and Le. It told the true story of a girl that left home against her mother’s wishes to be with her boyfriend who committed a robbery, double homicide without her knowledge. To her dismay when she woke up, her boyfriend was nowhere to be found. The girl was arrested and charged for felony murder, though she did not partake in the crime.

“Please hear our cries today, and push for legislation to change sentencing schemes in California for LWOPs,” said an emotional Murphy after her performance.

A speech by Eliza Hersh, from the Governor’s Office of Commutations, added that “the people that are here today are taking care of business on the outside. Take care of yourself and each other.”

The crowd erupted with emotion when the LWOP community performed “What About Us,” another skit choreographed by Le. It continued the story of “Walk Away Joe.” Now the girl is in prison and everyone is getting certifications, going to board, and getting released, while she’s denied, judged and treated with bias. As she drops to her knees in defeat, she pleads for a second chance.

In a final performance called “Invincible,” the girl has finally found her strength, no longer the scared, weak, little girl that she once was. Now courageously fighting to see a glimpse of hope in such a dark place, she broke away, ready to be free.

“It’s gonna be hard to do a grounding after that performance,” said Boundless Freedom Project’s Nhut Vo, as he led everyone into a grounding exercise. Afterwards, everyone was asked to break off into discussion circles.

The energy in the room had shifted to an almost quiet calmness as the circles began to wrap up.

“This has been an incredible moment for the CCWF LWOP community, to sponsor this event with mindfulness of inclusivity and community. Well done, so proud of my CCWF LWOP community,” stated Michele Scott, former LWOP.

CCWF’s PIO Lieutenant Monique Williams agreed.

“I am so excited to be here,” Williams said. “And Warden Anissa De La Cruz is really excited about sponsoring this event and ensuring that our LWOP individuals are seen, heard and not forgotten. We are so thankful for our Governors’ Office, outside agencies for coming out and our CCWF community for continuing to be pillars of their community.”

As it neared noon, Delina “DJ” Jahnigen, a current LWOP undergoing chemo for cancer, came up and spoke about the hardships of having cancer while incarcerated and having an LWOP sentence. This will be DJ’s third time in remission. She’s taken outside trips to medical over one hundred times, for eight hours at a time, just to come back and wait another three hours in the infirmary.

“It sucks to be in here sick, waiting months for a specialty appointment. Chemo is painful, it’s lonely and this is my third time in remission,” said an emotional DJ.

The smell of fried chicken engulfed the room as Plant Operations electrician Kenny Nichols pulled in a cart of food signaling that it was lunch time. The plates were topped with potato salad, macaroni salad, Hawaiian rolls and fried chicken. The volunteers went about the room passing out plates. Once everyone ate, there was another exercise presented by current LWOP Deserae James, called “Step to the Line”. The purpose of that exercise was to see everyone’s commonalities, to see that they weren’t all that much different and the only thing separating them from the outside guests were their LWOP sentences.

As the day came to a close there was one last performance beginning to take place. “Be Blessed” by Yolanda Adams made its way through the sound system, as a powerful praise dance unfolded before everyone’s eyes. To their surprise “Open My Heart,” by the same artist, soon followed behind. The praise dancers set the stage aflame. Tears flowed through the room as the dancers captured the attention of everyone.

At 3:00pm, the LWOP community and outside guests were called to the stage for Vasquez to take their picture. Following the photos, cake and candy were passed out. The MC announced that the event was over; gifts were given upon their departure.

“This moment is historical,” Elizabeth Lozano, sentenced to LWOP as a juvenile, said. “I never thought that LWOPs would actually be able to come together with the outside community to bring attention to LWOPs. An LWOP sentence causes shame and hopelessness.”

“Everybody deserves a second chance,” said former lifer Keeairra Dashiell of After Life Initiative.

For all present, truer words were never spoken.



Mimi Le, B Yard

Mimi Le brought the vision for the LWOP gathering, and a whole community rose up to make it happen. During the event, she explained that the purpose of the poster wall was “to allow each individual sentenced to life without the possibility of parole to represent themselves in any manner they chose.” Some chose poetry, others used photos, hand-drawn illustrations, collage or words of inspiration. Or all of the above.

Naturally, Le made a poster for herself, too. All the pictures she used represented her support system, which consists of her friends, family and children. She chose to highlight those individuals because, “they’re why I do what I do. My support system loves me unconditionally and is my driving force.”



Erica Olson, C Yard

Erica Olson created a poster dominated by a large butterfly with a pink ribbon. Olson, who is receiving treatment for breast cancer, said, “the butterfly signifies freedom and my ability to overcome anything. The pink ribbon signifies my transition to life without cancer.”



Catherine Thompson, C Yard

Catherine Thompson’s poster depicted her transition from the Condemned Row to General Population with an LWOP sentence.

“My transition has been exceptional,” Thompson said. “I am grateful to have the chance to get more engaged with the institution and get involved. My passion is working with ladies in the Skilled Nursing Facility and I never would have had that chance if I had not been released from the Row.”

COMMENTARY

By Kanoa Harris-Pendang

There are many opportunities to lessen substance abuse in prison.

One of them is Suboxone. This prescription drug is a combination of buprenorphine, an opioid substitute, and naloxone, an additive that prevents tampering with the pills. Suboxone is used to treat dependence on other opioids, like heroin. It can be used to stabilize someone in withdrawal during the medical detoxification process as well as for maintenance treatment, to promote recovery from opioid use disorder.

According to Inside CDCR, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation newsletter, Suboxone was widely introduced during the pandemic to help incarcerated people detox from opioid addiction. This was a part of a harm reduction measure. Harm reduction is a practice to protect the lives of people who use drugs.

Suboxone is a part of the medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program here at CCWF. This program operates on a dual process: treatment of opioid dependence and enrollment in the Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment (ISUDT) program (formally called SAP). There is a system in place that screens and evaluates every incarcerated person for the ISUDT program. MAT is a voluntary part of that program. Once in the program, one must be under the care of a physician and can complete the MAT program.

“The MAT program helps you stay grounded in a group setting so people will be able to grasp onto tools that will help them be successful,” said Valentin Ferrel, the program director for Amity Foundation, the nonprofit organization that provides CCWF’s MAT programming.

Suboxone is a good tool when used properly.

Adiba Karimi’s story is a good example. Karimi had a seven-year heroin addiction prior to getting on Suboxone two years ago. “Some people use it for fun,” Karimi said, “but for real heroin addicts it helps with cravings.” Though addiction is a struggle, she is optimistic about eventual parole and tapering completely off, as required.

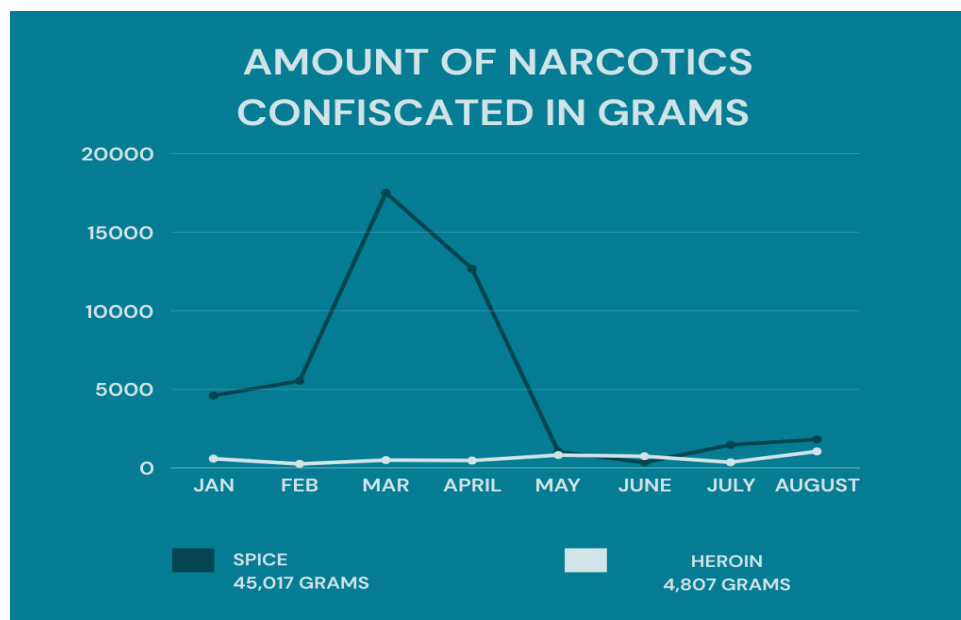
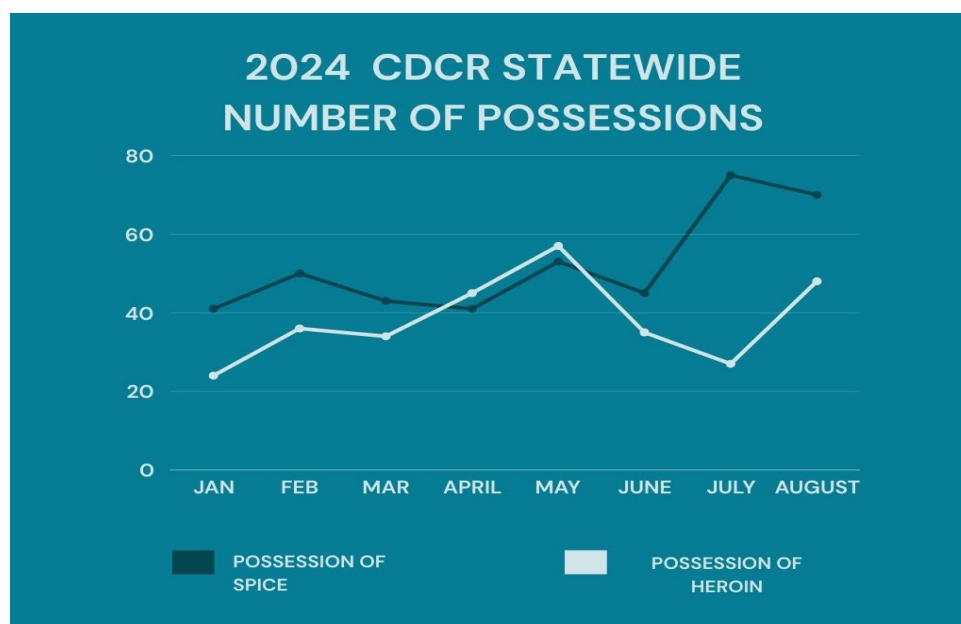
In the past few years, however, we have seen the once narrow path to Suboxone prescriptions widen.

I talked with an incarcerated person serving a Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentence who had been sober for 10+ years from a heroin addiction when they were recently ducated to Medical and offered Suboxone. This person, who would prefer to remain anonymous, told me they expressed a moment of relapsing thoughts at the offer, and ultimately sought out their support system to process the “weird” encounter. The only thing that seemed to have provoked this question was they had admitted 10 years prior to drug addiction. This person did not have any disciplinary actions involving substances nor had they requested help for substance use. It was baffling, to say the least.

Another incarcerated person shared how they were asked if they wanted Suboxone for pain. The incarcerated person expressed to me the fear they experienced being offered Suboxone by a professional who knew they were in recovery and had already

The Trouble with Suboxone

The drug epidemic continues in California prisons in the name of harm reduction



Infographic created by CCWF Paper Trail staff based on data from CDCR Division of Correctional Policy Research and Internal Oversight, Office of Research, published September 1, 2024.

refused Suboxone when deciding to get clean years earlier.

At first, these incidents seemed to be rare. As time goes on, it seems more like a medical trend. Residents don’t need a clearly defined reason to be on Suboxone, just a want. It’s easy to notice that many residents have been on Suboxone for years.

People at CCWF should have more treatment options to choose from.

One resident I talked to suggested bringing back processing groups. Currently ISUDT runs didactic groups, in which participants acquire seat time hours coupled with comple-

tion of the program to graduate. They used to have three hours per group five days a week. Now it’s just two hours, three days a week. Their belief is that being able to process helps folks accomplish minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day sobriety that is sought daily.

Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) and Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselors Maria Alaniz and Kim LaBore agreed that there should be a streamlined process for those who are serious about getting off drugs.

“There should be a yard for those who truly want to get off drugs,” Ala-

niz said. “This would be a specialized housing unit and would run more like a treatment center. That would be putting the California Model language of ‘normalization’ into action. Attending groups, going to programs, seeing a clinician, having access to mentors and sponsors, drop in meetings, incentive based activities, chores, etc.”

LaBore sees part of the issue as being able to have a place for anonymity to ask for help without consequence, shame or judgment. There has to be a goal in mind and we must celebrate every day of sobriety for those struggling to stay clean. The ultimate goal would be to taper off Suboxone and encourage self-will and internal strength.

There were three years to make a paradigm shift and change the culture when it came to drug addiction but that failed. Now here in 2024 another decision was made to provide every incarcerated person in the state of California with a Narcan nasal spray (used to reverse potentially fatal overdoses from opioids) in the name of harm reduction. The state also provides every person paroling with Narcan as a preventative maintenance measure.

“Narcan opens doors for people to take risks,” Alaniz said. “We’re in a place where there is active addiction. Folks are more apt to become a test dummy while their friend holds the can to ensure they will ultimately be okay.”

Recently a Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor (OMCP Mentor) was under a cloud of suspicion for being in two different locations on two separate days where someone was overdosing. Instead of staff asking if the mentor was okay, they had to provide a urine analysis and their room was ‘randomly’ searched minutes after the mentor stayed with the overdosing individual until medical assistance arrived.

There is a false narrative of being able to assist someone who is overdosing with administering Narcan.

CDCR policy tells us we are not supposed to be near anyone in a medical emergency. However, due to Narcan now being available to the population, there are questions regarding what CDCR’s official policy is and potential liability for incarcerated individuals who choose to intervene—or not—during a possible overdose.

Harm reduction measures have proven to activate ripple effects within the community. For example, the traumatized mentor trying to help her peer who allegedly overdosed expressed to me how that incident greatly affected her.

While we encourage safe practices, we’re not looking at unintended consequences and their effects. Retriggerring folks into relapse and re-traumatization. While we would like to think mental health services are readily available for those who need them, the reality of it is: it takes days to weeks to be seen here, in the largest women’s prison in the world.

The debate over what one sees as harm reduction continues. This is reminiscent of placing condoms in our restrooms. There is a concern that the next harm reduction implementation will be syringes. It is clear it is prohibited to have sex or use drugs in this environment, but it is going to happen, so let residents do it safely.



The Road Traveled Twice

Photo by Meritt Thomas on Unsplash

By Jamie R. Harrison

On December 22, 2011, I was sentenced to 41 years to life for burglary, vehicle theft and transportation. This was not the first time I made bad choices and harmed my community. I was a third-striker. After long arduous appeals, my sentence was amended to 25 to life.

On May 16, 2024, I was found suitable for parole. The life I lived no longer held me captive. I felt freer—just having told my story. I had to recognize where I came from and what I had done in order to heal the hurts I had endured, as well as make amends for the terrible decisions I made growing up. During the recollection of my past, I had to acknowledge I made some choices, but some events were out of my control.

It was not an easy journey. Yet the greatest gift was taking accountability for my actions and truly recognizing how I can make amends moving forward. Today, I give back by being of service to those struggling in their addictions. I am an active sponsor to my community and always share my experience to give the population the feeling of solidarity. I believe that when someone feels they're not alone,

they can continue to try.

Having to take the time to prepare mentally for the biggest interview of my life meant that I had to go backwards. I had to make connections to who I was, where I learned to make choices. I realized how selfish and devoid of genuine emotion I was. Created in the environment in which I was raised. I was definitely not my own person. After freeing myself of the chaos, I had to learn to be grateful for those experiences. This was the only way I could gain freedom on the inside. It is not often that someone gets a third chance; therefore, I will always remember the road I have not traveled to get where I am.

Preparing for the Board of Parole Hearings and awaiting the decision of my fate and accountability, I ran the tape back on my life.

I remember the late-night knocks as the place I resided was a revolving door for my parents' friends. I remember when mama used to rub my ear to fall asleep when I was afraid to go to bed. Nightmares would haunt me; I believed I was always in danger. I remember firefighter Di Napoli, a man passionate about saving the lives of

“I remember seeing the tears once again fall down my mother's cheek as the judge said, “Guilty.” I remember the warm, salty tears landing on my lips, traveling the same road I once came before.”

others. His big voice and playfulness during a tour to the firehouse in my small desert town. He was an inspiration to my little girl's dreams. The big red truck is a fascination to my unease and neglect. I remember being burned, learning how to cook, and my mama rushing me to cold water. The trauma turning to laughter: a memory that brings love. I was five when I knocked my mom's tooth out playing a game. I remember being scared of the yelling that was sure to come from my stepdad. Except there was no yelling, both parents laughed as I cried, praising me for being daddy's strong little girl.

I remember the absence of my parents when they abandoned me at a cousin's in another small town. The town was familiar but dark, no stoplights, neighbors a distance away. I ran away to the streets and drugs, engaging in unhealthy relationships to fill the voids of insecurities and loneliness. I remember the taste of burning fire as my breath was taken away from the first time I injected meth into my veins.

I remember the feeling of rejection the first time his fist hit me in the face: the bruises, scars, and the settling for less. I remember the cold steel within my palm as I thought about the grief and loss. Abandonment and death welcoming me but too cowardly to pull the trigger.

I remember the look in her eyes as she begged for her life. I remember the cold air as I helped pack the stolen goods and hopped in the back to flee the scene. She was beaten and taken advantage of for stereo equipment, jewelry, DVDs and drugs. I remember not feeling at all, as I ran with denial of the harm I caused. I remember the frigid steel bracelets placed upon my wrist as she identified me through video.

I remember the look in my mother's eyes, crying for where her baby girl has gone. I remember the hard bang of the gavel as it slams onto the judge's

podium. I remember fear engulfing me as I entered the gray stone and barbed wire.

I remember the phone calls and the tears shed through the years I spent in my selfishness. The nights I tried to sleep through the pain of missing my loved ones. Never once did I consider them. The days dragging with only one visit from my dad. I remember the lies I had to tell to keep his secrets my own. Everything learned a lie. I remember learning the truth, “he is a paid informant.” Everything I idolized turning to betrayal.

I remember the frost exiting the concrete box. After five years, I would get a new chance. I remember the late nights worried my dad would die in his sleep, battling the cancer that was ravishing his body. I remember the preacher's Elvis impersonation at the little white chapel in Vegas as my ex-husband and I said, “I do.”

I remember the heartache, stress, and overwhelming fears of loss and failure. I remember the lack of money, food, and urgency, Addiction clawing its way back into my life and losing it all.

I remember the sharp pain and red-stained palm as the window shattered. I remember the sound of the clutch pull as I drove away. I remember the pain in my chest as the red dots painted the stolen car. I remember my mother's scream raiding the air; I remember the black tar asphalt hot against my cheek as I was wrestled to the ground.

I remember seeing the tears once again fall down my mother's cheek as the judge said, “Guilty.” I remember the warm, salty tears landing on my lips, traveling the same road I once came before.

I remember, after serving 15 years on a 25 to life sentence, hearing the commissioner say, “I am proud to be the one to find you suitable today.”



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FEATURES



Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

There's no end to the excitement when the new trainees are on patrol

By Megan Hogg

It happened in late spring. It was the end of my workday and my mind was a little tired. So it didn't quite click when I saw in the distance what looked like little bear cubs stumbling and jumping around, making dust clouds.

But after a few seconds of confusion, I realized that the newest group from the Puppies Uplifting Prisoner's Spirits (PUPS) training program had arrived! I had seen pictures of them and was not so patiently awaiting their arrival. My fatigue turned into excitement as I picked up my pace and tried to count them—one, two, wait... is that the same one? Okay, three, four, oh my gosh they're moving so fast!

I usually consider the walk to and from my job to my yard the longest chore of my day, but in this moment, the 50 yards to my housing unit seemed impossibly long. Have you watched a movie where one of the characters is trying frantically to reach the end of a hallway, but the hallway keeps getting longer and longer?

That's how I felt trying to cover the ground to "Puppy Park"—the small triangular area in front of the housing unit 506 where the dogs play, socialize with each other and receive some of their training.

There were so many people looking through and over the fence to see the new arrivals. All I could hear were high pitched voices sounding like someone cooing to a baby and giggles of joy. It is one of the few times I have seen so many people gathered in front of the unit—probably about 20— and so many freely expressing their excitement, love and pleasure at seeing the new arrivals.

Many people at CCWF tend to carry themselves with a neutral, cautious, stoic, or angry facial expression that closes them off. Not that day though. I even heard one person remark that they can't stand dogs, but these puppies were cute.

There's just something about puppies that can make anyone a little goofy and giggly, myself particularly. I kept gasping and saying, "Oh you are such a cutie pie!", "I love dirty puppies!" and "Who is this pretty little thing?!"

I live in 506 and know all of the resident trainers. I jokingly asked them, "Why didn't I get a call at work when they arrived?" Another person said, "Yeah they shoulda' made an announcement in the units. I would've had my ass out here way sooner to see them."

The PUPS program began at CCWF in 2017. Since its start, more than 100 have received training to become service and companion dogs. There are 24 to 32 trainers at any given time, all of whom volunteer for the program and are chosen via application. They should all be commended for their commitment to the program in addition to their regular job assignments, groups and school.

Most times, the puppies arrive at 10 to 12 weeks old and are barely potty trained. Working in pairs, trainers learn how to teach the puppies basic commands: sit, stand, stay, heel, wait, potty, and their names, among other things. This is the foundation for all of the training they will continue to receive until they are placed with a recipient or "their person."

Living in the same unit as the training program has its perks. I already knew all of the puppies' names. They are sent with pictures prior to arrival from Little Angels Service Dogs in San Diego, where the puppies are born. The litter that arrived on May 29 are Tootsie, Razzle, Kit Kat, Heath, York, Reese and Hershey (sense a theme?).

Now all that was left to do was figure out who was who. This proved to be a bit harder than it has been in the past. These cuties are a mix of Bernese Mountain dogs and Poodles, known as Bernadoodles. They all have semi-long black fur with small areas of white fur on their chests. Some of them have white tips on their tails, some with it on their feet, a couple have white patches or white streaks on their head. One of them—Razzle—has almost no white fur at all. When they look up at you from under their bushy eyebrows, they do so with the most loving look, as if they would say "oh I love you so much, go ahead and love me back!"

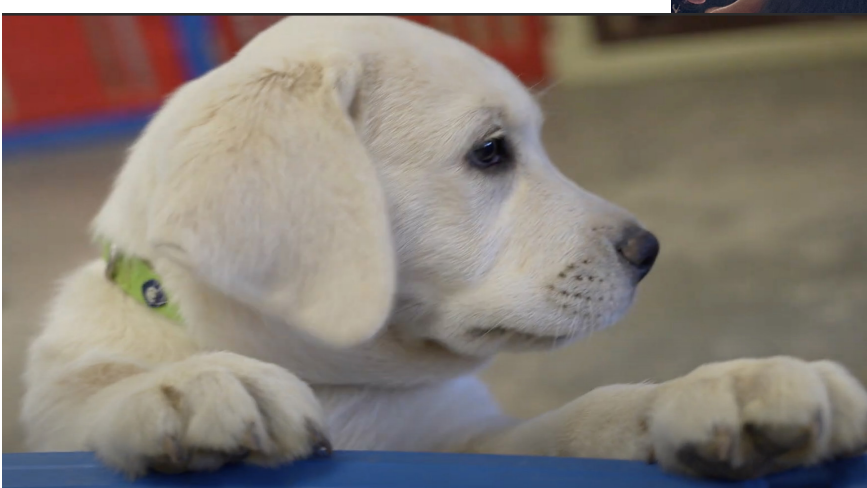
By the time late summer rolled around, a new picture went up in 506 showing one of the PUPS program's graduated dogs. Her name is Dakota, a black Labrador. The photo showed her nursing her new litter! These puppies would be arriving soon. I knew I would be checking daily to see if the names had been chosen, and looking forward to seeing people's high spirits and cheerful reactions when the newest furballs arrive and play in the Puppy Park for the first time.

September 11, 2001 is a very important day in American history. Twenty-three years later, I am still reminded of how impactful that day was, despite already being incarcerated. This year, though, I was also able to find some joy, as Dakota's litter arrived. There are nine of them: three girls and six boys, all of which have been named after athletes: Serena (Williams), Scottie (Scheffler) and Billy (Walton) for the female puppies. The male ones are Peyton (Manning), James (LeBron), Jordan (Michael), Rory (McElroy), Clyde (Drexler) and Brady (Tom). One of the females and two of the males are pale yellow labs, believed to take after the father, while the rest are black like Dakota.

Within the next few weeks, they will have received all of their shots and begin regular socializing with residents. Until that time, many of us will be around the Puppy Park, smiling, laughing, cooing and just simply finding some light in the darkness.



PUPS trainer Maria Serrato, Healthcare Access Sergeant Dustin Brown (Center) and PUPS trainer Heather Brown (right) supervise the newest arrivals.



Photos by Monique Williams