

CCWF PAPER TRAIL

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HOWL Immigration Empowerment Day



Illustration by Canva AI

By Sagal Sadiq

A small Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) inmate leisure time activity group called Helping Others with Life Skills (HOWL) partnered with outside agencies to create a Day of Empowerment, held in the gym on May 2, 2026.

Personnel from Freedom for Immigrants, CALDEFENSE, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Orange County Rapid Response Network, and Stanford Law School showed up to provide

information to incarcerated individuals facing deportation.

Stephanie Love, HOWL's sponsor since 2011, kicked off the event with introductions and gratitude to all in attendance.

"Today's event is to help those impacted by the fear of deportation by providing them with information," Love said. "Everyone selected for this event is here because they have an active Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) hold."

Residents Cynthia Dubose and Tien Mo, both HOWL members, moderated a Q&A with a panel of six from the Orange County Rapid Response Network, Stanford Law School, and Freedom for Immigrants.

The panel provided information vital to navigating the complexities inherent to the immigration and deportation process. Since nearly half of the participants were Spanish speaking, the entire Q&A was interpreted into Spanish by HOWL member Rosa Marin.

Longterm CCWF resident Rebeca Nivarez, mother of two and grandmother of three, expressed gratitude for the translation of the Q&A. She indicated that she would be walking out of the event with "many key pieces of information that [she] didn't know, that were explained today."

When asked about the biggest impact her ICE hold would have on her life, Nivarez said she imagines her grandchildren saying, "Don't take away our grandma." That brings her immeasurable sadness.

After the Q&A, Nora Igova and Mo, both members of HOWL as well as CCWF Paper Trail, shared their testimonies with the participants. Both women face deportation back to the countries of their birth, Bulgaria and China respectively. They shared similar stories about fear, feeling alienated, uncertainty and hopelessness. Their words resonated with participants.

Zewoinesh Badasso, another long term resident of CCWF, said "I feel them, because I too feel stressed and afraid about going back home."

Andres Rodriguez from Freedom for Immigrants said it best: "It's easier to fight for the rights of the free undocumented and much harder to fight for the rights of the felons who are also undocumented."

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Juneteenth Gaining More Cultural Recognition

By Vegas Bray

How many of us have celebrated Juneteenth annually? How many of us knew the history behind its celebration?

Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) Resident Tyeshia Moore remembered celebrating the month of Juneteenth, but not the date because it wasn't declared a federal holiday until 2021.

"I could tell it was a cultural thing, but no one educated me on why we were celebrating," Moore said.

When Moore first got the chance to be a part of CCWF's 2024 Juneteenth educational event, she didn't hesitate to jump in. "It got more serious to me when I came to learn about the roots of why Juneteenth is Freedom Day. Once the topic of

Juneteenth came up, I wanted to know the history behind it."

A few years ago, I asked my grandmother if she'd ever celebrated Juneteenth. My grandmother went so far as to tell me why it's a date worth celebrating. Not only did she explain June 19 as Freedom Day, but she also reminded me why it's an important tradition to pass down from generation to generation.

On my grandmother's birth certificate, she's labeled as "Negro" under her race. She thought it interesting to see the cultural changes with her grandkids and her great-grandkids. She also encouraged me to continue asking questions and said, "What makes you want to ask?" This was my opportunity to tell my grandmother about my gradual learning of Juneteenth and

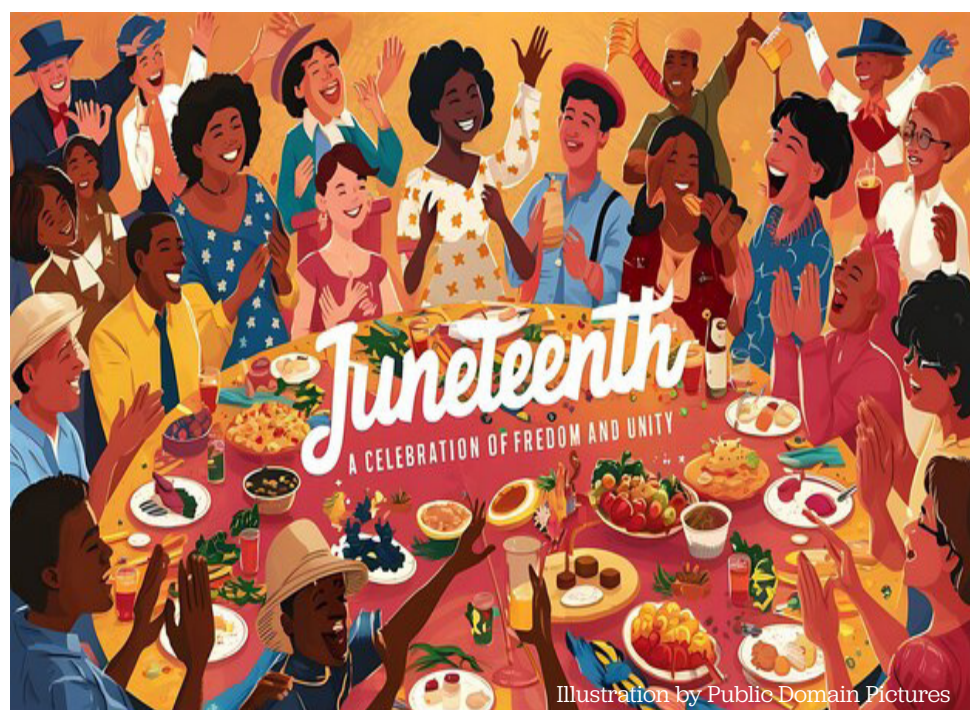


Illustration by Public Domain Pictures

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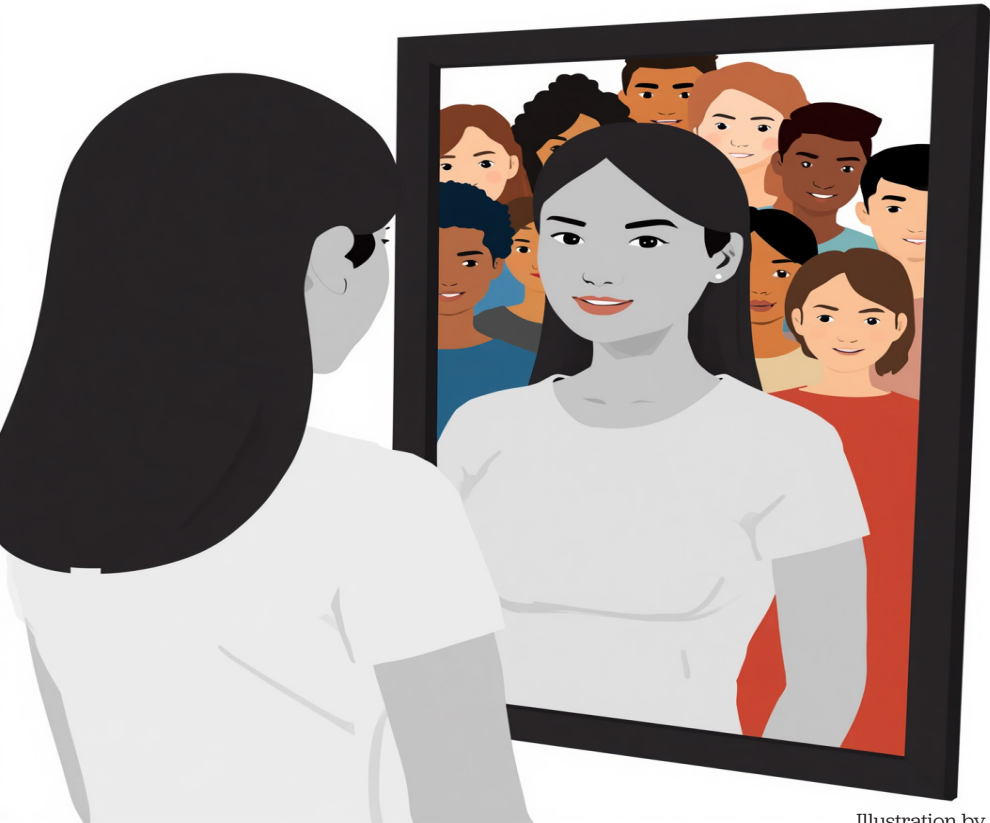


Illustration by Canva AI

By Mimi Le

When I began my life without parole sentence more than 20 years ago, I was lucky enough to learn some important lessons. One vital seed of knowledge I'd like to pass on to those coming into prison is: be selfish!

During incarceration, you shed the demands and roles that you have lived with your entire life.

No outside pressures dictate how you spend your time. Everything you do or say is entirely up to you. You do not need to be nice to the neighbors or coworkers, pretend to suck up to your dreaded boss, or be forced to spend an afternoon babysitting someone else's children.

In other words, you can be selfish.

What you do with yourself is your choice. And the result of your actions will have consequences, some good and some bad.

Sure, you can sleep in and not go to work or school, and the consequences are ones that only you will suffer, whether receiving a rules violation report (RVR) or not being able to complete a program and earn time off your sentence. You can decide you want to stay to yourself, but when you need some advice or comfort, you will probably find yourself alone.

Being selfish also entitles you to put yourself first by making decisions that benefit you. You can watch the television show you like the best and read books that you like to read. You can prioritize your over-all self-care.

Being away from the old you and stepping into the new you is the most liberating, empowering, and scariest thing you will have to face.

During my first year of incarceration, someone asked me what my favorite food was and I was at a loss. Up until that point, I had not considered what I liked, since I had a family to look after starting at a young age. I simply ate what my husband and kids enjoyed. What I found out through some reflection was: I love spaghetti and cheesy garlic bread.

This began my journey of self-discovery. Discovering my likes and dislikes helped

me build my self-esteem by allowing me to acknowledge that I mattered too. I took codependency classes and self-esteem workshops that also bolstered my value.

What will your reflection show about you when you look into the mirror? Will you like the woman staring back at you? Who will you be when you are not worried about the food that everyone likes to eat and instead make something only you enjoy?

Two women I've known for ages—Naomi Heater and Julie Hinojosa—are great role models for how focusing on yourself can lead to meaningful transformation.

Heater is the chairperson of Helping Others With Life Skills, an Inmate Leisure Time Activity Group, as well as a core facilitator of Living Outside Violence Everyday, and has been incarcerated for more than 25 years.

"I was surrounded my whole life by people that only worried about themselves," Heater said. She began her incarceration receiving multiple RVRs until she began taking self-help classes and found her determination in servicing the community. "I think about others and I have found a lot of purpose and meaning in living a life of service to others," said Heater.

Resident Julie Hinojosa has been incarcerated for over 20 years. Hinojosa is an active member of the Institution Advisory Council, and she is often called upon to mediate situations between staff and other residents.

Hinojosa recalled how she was unable to ask for assistance when she arrived to prison, so she had to rely on herself to figure things out. Based on her experiences early on in her incarceration, she now tries to help others.

"Today, I have become a person that helps people so that they do not feel alone. I help anyone that needs it and will go above and beyond for my community," Hinojosa said.

If you decide to become selfless instead of selfish, you may find purpose in helping others. By participating in random acts of kindness towards others, you may find a sense of meaning.

CCWF Paper Trail EST. 2024

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COVER STORY: HOWL IMMIGRATION...
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ed; and yet that is what we do.”

Next, it was time for the one-on-one consultations, held at tables arranged around the periphery of the gym.

This was the time for the participants to ask specific questions pertaining to their immigration case

factors, gather relevant resource materials, and network with the outside agencies in attendance.

After the one-on-ones, both participants and outside personnel shared a lunch of pizza and soda. But even during lunch, the networking didn’t stop; all over the gym people were engaged in discussions about ICE

detainers, legal permanent residency, and applying for asylum. There were expressions of gratitude all over the gym.

“I am grateful for all the information I received,” Yan Zhang, a Mandarin-speaking CCWF resident, said, “and I am especially grateful for all the support from both inside and

outside people.”

Elodia Chamorro, CCWF long-termer, mother of six and grandmother of seven, said, “I wish ICE officials could see me; I have lived here all my life. I am an asset to my community, and even though I am undocumented, in my heart, I am as American as you.”

HOWL Día de Empoderamiento

De Sagal Sadiq

Traducida por
Guadalupe Barragan

Un pequeño grupo de actividades recreativas para reclusas de Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF), llamado “Helping Others with Life Skills” (HOWL), colaboró con organizaciones externas para organizar un “Día de Empoderamiento,” celebrada en el gimnasio el 2 de mayo de 2026.

Representantes de Freedom for Immigrants, CALDEFENSE, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Orange County Rapid Response Network, y Stanford Law School acudieron para brindar información a las reclusas que enfrentan una posible deportación.

Stephanie Love, coordinadora del grupo HOWL desde 2011, dio inicio al evento con una presentación y palabras de agradecimiento para todos los asistentes.

“El evento de hoy busca ayudar a quienes viven con el temor a la deportación, proporcionándoles información,” señaló Love. “Todas las personas seleccionadas para este evento están aquí porque tienen una orden de retención activa del Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE).”

Las reclusas Cynthia Dubose y Tien Mo, ambas integrantes de HOWL, moderaron una sesión de preguntas y respuestas con un panel compuesto por seis personas de la Orange County Rapid Response Network, Stanford Law School y Freedom for Immigrants.

El panel ofreció información vital para desenvolverse en las complejidades inherentes a los procesos de inmigración y deportación. Dado que casi la mitad de los participantes eran hablantes en epanoñol, toda la sesión de pregun-

tas y respuestas fue interpretada al español por Rosa Marin, miembro de HOWL.

Rebeca Nivarez, residente de larga estancia en el CCWF, madre de dos hijos y abuela de tres nietos, expresó su agradecimiento por la traducción de la sesión. Comentó que se marchaba del evento con “mucha información clave que desconocía y que se explicó hoy.”

“He vivido aquí toda mi vida...aunque no tengo documentos, en mi corazon soy tan estadounidense como ustedes,” dijo Elodia Chamorro.

Al preguntársele cuál sería el mayor impacto de su retención por parte de ICE en su vida, Nivarez dijo imaginar a sus nietos diciendo: “No se lleven a nuestra abuela.” Esa idea le provoca una tristeza inmensa.

Tras la sesión de preguntas y respuestas, Nora Igova y Mo –ambas miembros de HOWL y de CCWF Paper Trail– compartieron sus testimonios con los participantes. Ambas mujeres se enfrentan a la deportación a sus países de origen: Bulgaria y China, respectivamente. Relataron historias similares marcadas por el miedo, la sensación de aislamiento, la incertidumbre y la desesperanza. Sus palabras calaron hondo entre los asistentes.

Zewoinesh Badasso, otra residente de larga estancia en el CCWF, comentó: “Las comprendo,

porque yo también siento estrés y miedo ante la idea de regresar a mi país.”

Andrés Rodríguez, de la organización Freedom for Immigrants, lo expresó de la mejor manera: “Es más fácil luchar por los derechos de los indocumentados que están en libertad y mucho más difícil luchar por los derechos de aquellos que, además de ser indocumentados, tienen antecedentes penales; y, sin embargo, eso es lo que hacemos.”

A continuación, llegó el turno de las consultas individuales, que se llevaron a cabo en mesas dispuestas alrededor del gimnasio. Fue el momento para que los participantes hicieran preguntas específicas sobre sus casos migratorios, recojieron materiales informativos y establecieran contactos con las organizaciones externas presentes.

Tras las consultas individuales, tanto los participantes como el personal externo compartieron un almuerzo de pizza y refrescos. Sin embargo, ni siquiera durante la comida cesó el intercambio de información; por todo el gimnasio, la gente conversaba sobre los detenidos por ICE, la residencia permanente legal y la solicitud de asilo. Se percibían muestras de gratitud en todo el gimnasio.

“Agradezco toda la información que he recibido,” declaró Yan Zhang, residente del CCWF y hablante de mandarín, “y estoy especialmente agradecida por todo el apoyo brindado tanto por las personas de dentro como por las de fuera.”

Elodia Chamorro, residente de larga estancia de CCWF, madre de seis hijos y abuela de siete nietos, dijo: “Ojalá los funcionarios de ICE pudieran verme; he vivido aquí toda mi vida. Soy un aporte para mi comunidad y, aunque no tengo documentos, en mi corazón soy tan estadounidense como ustedes.”

COVER STORY: JUNETEENTH...
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

its relevance today.

Throughout my time here, I’ve been able to do my own research through Encyclopedia Britannica. The name “Juneteenth” combines the month of June with the 19th day of the month.

The date was chosen because although then-President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, freeing African-Americans from slavery, it took another two and a half years for the news to reach Texas. Texas became the last Confederate state to free their enslaved population on June 19, 1865. Now, Juneteenth has gained more cultural recognition than ever.

With much-needed change in racial justice policy, former President Joe Biden signed Juneteenth into law on June 17, 2021, making it an observed Federal holiday.

Also known as Emancipation Day and Jubilee Day, Juneteenth events bring communities together



through music, dancing, parades, festivals, and family gatherings.

Red foods and drinks such as barbecued meats, cherry cobbler, and red sodas have been vital in Juneteenth celebrations to represent bloodshed and respect ancestral strength and sacrifice.

But it wasn’t always celebrated at CCWF.

“I’ve never seen it promoted in the institution until recently, and I’ve been here since 2016,” said resident M. Njoku.

As far as she knows, Juneteenth has been celebrated in her family for generations.

“Events were held at a park in Sacramento. We played games and sports and they gave you updates

about resources in your community concerning African Americans,” she said.

Many of us didn’t have an understanding of Juneteenth or its importance before our incarceration. As each year passes, I notice more and more people who choose to participate in its educational events. Through these events, we’re learning more about the need for civil rights and activism.

Within the past couple of years, CCWF has had success in throwing a gathering together. I’ve seen traditional dancing, heard spoken word poetry, singing, and praising at past events along with Juneteenth colors of red, yellow and green.

A sense of camaraderie and community builds with each Juneteenth celebration. The support and interest from many other cultures have increased, showing us how our cultural background doesn’t divide us; it brings forth unity.

Now, I’m able to share more of what I’ve learned with my grandmother and the rest of my family. Who are you sharing your history with?

FEATURES

Books Bring Belonging

CCWF is creating community around a shared love of stories thanks to a new book club



Illustration by Sonia Garcia

By Kristin Rossum

The Recreation Library has long been a place of escape and solace for many at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). But over the past nine months, since the start of the Book Club, it has also become a place for socializing, community building, and lively debate.

Book Club meetings turn the library from a quiet place to one filled with much laughter and eager voices. The group members huddle into the chairs and gather around the table with their books ready to share and discuss their ideas.

Books have a way of opening both the hearts and minds of readers, and, under the guidance of Librarian L. Andrade, our book club has created an entire community of passionate and dedicated bibliophiles eager to attend the next meeting.

As incarcerated participant Kendra Andersen-Schwegerl said, participating in Book Club has brought her, "a new found sense of community with like-minded people where we can discuss books that we all enjoy in a positive environment."

Andrade is the driving force behind the success of the Book Club which began on Sept. 25, 2025. She established it with the support of the CCWF Education Department and with partial funding from the Office of Correctional Education (OCE) in Sacramento.

OCE provided several titles of fiction, classical literature, and nonfiction, and Andrade added several additional titles of literature and fantasy to the rotation.

The result has been received by CCWF readers with great enthusiasm resulting in several different biweekly sessions to accommodate the interest. Since its inception, the Book Club has grown

to approximately 46 members and collectively they have completed reading 20 different titles, many of them part of a series. The most popular book title so far has been "The Fourth Wing," a fantasy series which has been on the Book Club rotation over four times so far.

Andrade shared that she has loved reading since she was little. However, her love of libraries didn't develop until she was in junior high school. She was on the drill team and her coach was the librarian so the team would regularly meet in the library. And so began a match made in heaven.

Andrade reads every book that is discussed at Book Club and facilitates every round. Her love of books and wonderfully sarcastic humor makes

every participant in the group feel welcome and like their viewpoint matters. When the Book Club is in session, you walk into a circle of women emotionally invested in the topic and engaged in lively discussion. Andrade said that her "favorite part is bringing the shy participants out of their shells."

CCWF resident Janine Chandler is involved in every Book Club session and helps to facilitate the participant discussions. As the club evolved, she noticed, the different sessions became very unique, with people expressing "different beliefs, different interpretations, and different interactions between the participants," Chandler said.

"I particularly like how fantasy can be reflective of our life, our society, and allow individuals to get a deeper meaning in a more abstract way," Chandler said. "Book Club gets deep. It can allow participants to receive a healing they wouldn't otherwise receive."

Sonia Garcia is another committed member of the CCWF Book Club. "The Book Club helped me remember how much I love reading literature," she said. It also helped her to reprioritize reading as self-care, self-love, and restoration. Garcia enjoys the lively discussions about the books assigned.

She acknowledges, "not everyone is going to agree, but in Book Club, everyone's viewpoint is heard and it is a safe place to disagree." In addition, Book Club has brought her out of her comfort zone and has allowed her to fall in love with a new genre – fantasy.

"Woven Kingdom" by Tahereh Mafi is Garcia's favorite book so far from Book Club. What she loves the most about this fantasy series is, "the author's colorful character building, and the fact

“The Book Club helped me remember how much I love reading literature,” Sonia Garcia said. It also helped her to reprioritize reading as self-care, self-love and restoration.

How Books Get Banned

Law requires CDCR to provide clear reasons for its disallowed book list but, our writer argues, making sense of the list is more complicated

By Megan Hogg

Thanks to the presence of our Recreation Library with its Book Club, and unit libraries provided by Freedom Reads, books play an important role in creating community at Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF).

Still, access to books inside prisons is complicated, due to state and federal regulations. And the list of books allowed inside California prisons – the Centralized List of Disapproved Publications –is constantly changing.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation published the most recent version of the list on its website on April 1, 2026. It contains 179 pages of books, magazines and other publication titles, along with the reasons for their exclusion.

Based on this new list, the CCWF library staff were required to pull approximately 75 titles from the shelves. One recent addition to the list is a special-collection printing of a book from the CCWF Book Club: The Fourth Wing, Wing and Claw Collection, The Empyrean, from 2025.

“How does National Geographic appear on the list, but not any encyclopedias? Or, dare I say, the Bible?”

(Thankfully, other paperback editions of the book are still allowed.)

The reason provided for banning this particular book was that it “lacks serious literary artistic, political, or scientific value.”

This justification can be found in the California

Code of Regulations, Title 15. In the sections on contraband, you will find multiple subsections that explain the “what and why” for material that has been deemed unacceptable for incarcerated persons to have.

But this rather strange phrasing has an even older origin, based in federal law. In Roth vs U.S.(1957), the U.S. Supreme Court established guidelines to determine what material counts as obscene; namely, would “...the average person, applying contemporary adult community standards” consider that:

1. The matter, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests.
2. Depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way.
3. Whether a reasonable person finds the matter, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary artistic, political, or scientific value.

The justification for putting many of the titles on the disapproved publication list can be considered self-explanatory: weapons, weapon building, explicit sex, gang-related material, gambling, etc. However, it is difficult to comprehend the inclusion of others.

Take National Geographic, for instance. Forty-one different issues of National Geographic from as early as 1972 up to 2025 appear on the list, despite it being listed in the Title 15 as a publication that “shall be allowed.” The subsection reasons listed do vary, and some meet the criteria for disapproval. However, I am personally baffled and offended that the some of the disapproved issues were considered “lack[ing] serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.” Really?

How does National Geographic appear on the list, but not any encyclopedias? Or, dare I say, the Bible?

Cain and Abel, Moses and his people being forced to slave and suffer for 40 years. The adulterers in Sodom and Gomorrah. The first story of man and woman in the Bible discusses their nudity and then one of their sons kills the other. These depictions technically fall under the criteria for disapproval too.

Interested in Egyptian artifacts? There are hundreds of thousands of pieces and collections on display in museums and books, and many of them hold pictures or carvings simulating events of daily life. Among these are hunting battles, war, sex, and violent deaths. These too can be

CDCR Statement

CDCR adheres to the policies in California Code of Regulations, Title 15, Section 3006 on contraband in determining disapproved publications. Reasons for disapproving certain National Geographic issues include that some contain obscene text, “which to the average person, applying contemporary statewide standards, appeals to the prurient interest; depicts sexual conduct; and which, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”

found in an Encyclopedia.

While I may be biased because National Geographic has been not only a staple in my life from a very young age, but a favorite for informational and recreational reading as an adult. It has received innumerable awards over the years. This, and the fact that it is also held in high regard by historical societies, educational institutions, and millions of readers and leaders, all because of its content, ethics, longevity, and consistency in transparency and reliability.

Access to knowledge is a gateway for change, growth, and improvement. That access is not limited to magazines like National Geographic, or to strictly educational publications.

And publications that create opportunities for people to gather, to exchange thoughts and feelings, and to enjoy a shared reading experience–in other words, to create community–have huge literary and even political value.

In this sense, book bans threaten more than just civil rights, especially if they are loosely thrown onto groups or genres that don’t meet the criteria as a whole.

that the story involves jiin, which is unusual.” She also likes the fact that the author is a woman of color.

“Books have always been my escape,” said CCWF resident and Book Club member Nancy Ortiz. In her down time she can always be found with her head buried in a book. When she first heard about the Book Club, she was bursting with enthusiasm and excitement about reading new books and being able to share the experience with others.

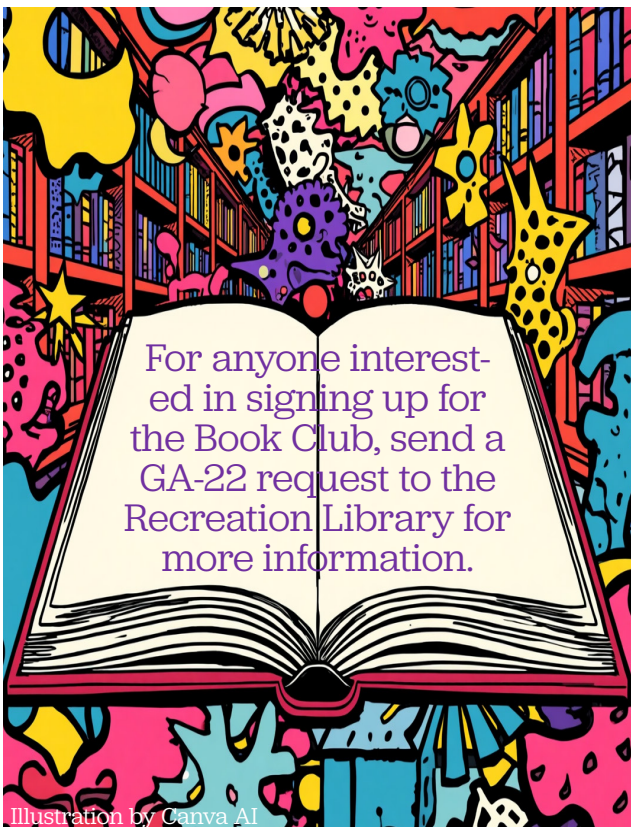
“It takes me out of prison,” Ortiz said. She said she likes, “being able to relate to the characters and apply the themes to our lives.”

The Book Club is an opportunity to share your passion of books with others obsessed with diving into a good story. If books are your escape, and you feel at peace bonding with others over a mesmerizing tale, then the Book Club might be for you.

Andrade has compiled a diverse list of titles that are available to review for those who wish to sign up for the waiting list. Hope to see you there on our next journey.

List of books offered for Book Club:

“The Woven Kingdom” (series)
“The Mountain is You” (non-fiction)
“Three Dark Crowns” (series)
“The Fourth Wing” (series)
“The Midnight Library”
“The Book Thief”
“Little Women”
“Frankenstein/Dracula/Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde”
“The Pearl”
“The Best Short Stories of 2024”
“The Best American Science Fiction Fantasy 2024”
“The Best American Short Stories 2023”
“The House on Mango Street”
“Elevation”
“Night” (non-fiction)
“In Five Years”
“Black Chameleon” (non-fiction)
“Something in the Water”
More Book Titles Coming Soon.....



For anyone interested in signing up for the Book Club, send a GA-22 request to the Recreation Library for more information.

Illustration by Canva AI

A Special Kind of Leadership



How Christina Davis empowers incarcerated women

As an Industrial Superintendent II for CALCTRA Optical Lab at CCWF, Christina Davis cultivates production and respect amongst the women.

Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

By Erica Olson

Christina Davis may be short in stature, but her personality is larger than life. On any given day, you can see her running around the California Correctional Training Rehabilitation Authority (CALCTRA) Optical Lab at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) encouraging the facility's incarcerated optical technicians to do their best work.

The optical lab makes glasses, from grinding prescriptions into blank lenses to polishing the completed frames. As a recently promoted Industrial Superintendent II, Davis is responsible for managing workflow, purchasing equipment, and supervising all on-site personnel. She joins a small cohort of women at this leadership level. According to CALCTRA Public Information Officer Michelle Kane, approximately 25% of the employees holding the

CALCTRA Industrial Superintendent II position are women.

Countless times, her team has observed her putting her hair up in a messy bun, pulling on her gloves, and jumping in to help where necessary. As incarcerated employee Jerrolyn Hunt said, "She will get down and dirty with us!" This is just one of the things that makes Davis valued by her team.

Davis previously worked in the medical field. She was actually at an appointment with her optometrist when he told her about a job opening and asked if she would be willing to interview for the position. Two weeks later, she re-interviewed and soon after began her optical career. That was in 2004.

In June 2022, Davis transferred from the private sector and began her career at Valley State Prison.

She started as an industrial supervisor and was content in that role. She excelled and became the first woman to learn and supervise the surfacing department, responsible for grinding and polishing lenses. Davis has been at CCWF since September 2024. Because of her dedication and strong work ethic, she earned the opportunity to promote to her current position.

CALCTRA Industrial Supervisor Shannon Gillis shared that she has worked in a male-dominated field for years. Gillis was excited when she learned that Davis would be the new superintendent for optical. Gillis said that she has seen how dialed in Davis has been since she walked into the lab, and how she connects with the women, guiding them with

understanding and respect.

"Watching their growth under her leadership has been inspiring. It's incredibly refreshing to have someone in her position who truly knows what it is like to be a woman in a man's world," said Gillis.

Davis admitted that learning to delegate is one of the struggles she has faced in her role as superintendent since she historically had the "I'll do it myself" attitude. She must have gotten that from her father, who is her inspiration. "He is a hard worker, a jack of all trades, and has a can-do attitude," Davis said.

When asked about overcoming challenges relative to working in prison, Davis also shared that "building bridges of honest communication" is a challenge, since some people can see her as a pushover while others see her as strict. She tries to stay respectful and understanding.

"I will treat others how I want to be treated and encourage others that anything is possible if you have the right people and the ambition. I am not judgmental nor above anyone. I'm just your average Jane," Davis said.

For resident Patricia Presba, a CALCTRA Optical clerk, Davis is more than that.

"Davis is kind and patient, and she treats us all the same. She is also knowledgeable and is willing to share that knowledge with us," Presba said. "She is an inspiration to all of us women."

"I will treat others how I want to be treated and encourage others that anything is possible if you have the right people and the ambition," Christina Davis said.



Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

CCWF’s First Onsite Incarcerated Optician

By Sagal Sadiq

On Jan. 16, 2026, Dawn Godman did what no incarcerated man or woman has done before in Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF). She took and passed the American Board of Opticians (ABO) National Opticianry Competency Examination.

Godman said, “I am ecstatic,” when asked how she felt to have accomplished such a feat.

Although Godman has been a lab technician for five years with California Correctional Training Rehabilitation Authority (CALCTRA), formerly CALPIA, she had to complete 6000 hours of training on-site and four training system program manuals.

The final hurdle was being able to do quality control on a set of glasses before they are shipped out.

It was only when these tasks were complete that she was then eligible to take the pretest, which she had to pass with a score of 70% or better before being allowed to take the actual ABO exam.

All Superintendent I’s are ABO-approved proctors, so the two-hour, 100-question test can be taken onsite.

Obtaining her ABO certification has been a goal Godman has been working toward for 15 years. Her journey started while she worked at Optical in Valley State Prison for Women.

When CALCTRA opened optical in 2021, Godman applied herself, completed her apprenticeship, met all the prerequisites, and finally achieved her dream.

Thinking about what this accom-



Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

Obtaining her ABO certification has been a goal Godman has been working toward for 15 years. Her journey started while she worked at Optical in Valley State Prison for Women.

plishment means to her, Godman said, “This certification gives me the opportunity to support myself and not have to rely on anyone when I parole.”

Godman credits a lot of her success to the support of her immediate supervisor, Christina Davis, and the flexibility she demonstrated when she allowed Godman to study for an hour a day while at work.

Godman spent that time using a specialized textbook called Pure Optics to study for the ABO. That text is not permitted to leave the premises, and so Godman said she was grateful to have had the opportunity to utilize it during her work hours.

Reflecting on what part of the exam she found most challenging, Godman indicated that she found the progressive lens portions the most difficult because she has not had the chance to work with those types of lenses here at CALCTRA labs.

“Progressive lenses are eyewear that have a bifocal portion without the visible line that most CALCTRA eyewear have,” Godman said. “However, with a progressive lens, that line is invisible.”

Any place that dispenses glasses has to have an optician on-site to open its doors. By passing the exam, Godman said she is eligible to be hired as an on-site optician in any eyewear store in America.

When asked why her long-term goal was optometry, Godman said, “I enjoy the work. I found purpose in helping others see better. Our contract is with the California Department of Health Care Services for Medi-Cal patients. I was once a Medi-Cal recipient; my family is on Medi-Cal. This is my living amends.”

Felon’s Alphabet



Illustration by Canva AI

By Sagal Sadiq

When the topic of self-control is discussed, it is usually talked about in the context of either resisting temptation or staying calm. But self-control goes deeper than that. The development of self-control will put you on a trajectory towards freedom. Both in prison and in life outside these walls, self-control is an essential life skill.

Webster’s Dictionary defines self-control as “having control of one’s emotions, desires, and actions.”

In prison, self-control is the difference between progressing toward release, losing months of good time credits, staying on track or regressing, or being rehouse in the Restricted Housing Unit, AKA going to jail.

At any given moment, one wrong decision could cost you months of freedom. I don’t believe people in the free world realize how much discipline it takes to maintain self-control in prison. They don’t understand what it is like to be surrounded by triggers, noise, disrespect, boredom, trauma, fear, ego, and still choose to keep yourself emotionally regulated.

Contrary to what some incarcerated individuals believe, self-control in prison is not about shutting down your emotions, staying “out the way,” hiding in “your corner,” or the very common, “staying to myself.” Instead, it’s about teaching yourself how to manage your emotions, so they don’t manage you.

Self-control starts with self-awareness. You need to know what sets you off. Everyone has triggers. Identify what they are. Is it noise, proximity, waiting, disrespect, being “talked to crazy,” or authority figures? Then figure out what coping methods alleviate these triggers. This is where relapse prevention plans come into play. Now, decide. Decide that your future matters more than a fleeting moment, even when every part of you is urging you to do something: swear, swing,

retaliate, or prove something.

Repeat after me: “I will not lose my date over petty B.S.”

A lot of incarcerated individuals grew up in environments where self-control wasn’t taught, modeled, or rewarded. You learned never to back down because backing down meant you could get labeled a “sucka,” hurt, or even killed.

Except now all the rules are different. Now, you are expected to give respect even when you don’t get it. Now, you must tolerate people testing you, walk away from folk who are “tryna bait you,” deescalate when you want to explode. Let’s stipulate for the record, self-control can be difficult for everyone; in prison, it can almost be impossible. I say almost, because, although hard as hell, it is possible. Self-control is one of the most difficult skill sets a person can develop on the inside.

Discipline is the scaffold self-control is built upon. It means getting up and going to work even when you would rather sleep, working out even when you’re tired, doing your homework instead of playing with your tablet, and going to self-help groups when you would rather be binge-watching novellas.

Self-control will teach you the value of pausing. That pause, the moment between impulse and action, that can be the difference between a clean Central File and a new charge, between peace and violence, between healing and repeating old patterns.

FEATURES

Helen's Hellos

A quest of spreading smiles and greetings to the world



Photo by CCWF Paper Trail

By Nora Igova

Helen Fautua, originally from American Samoa, is a 32-year-old short-term resident of Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) who greets everyone with exuberance, always calling them by their first name.

She has an intense yet shy stare. Her big brown puppy eyes draw you in with palpable kindness and a longing for love and belonging.

She can often be seen walking with gentle intention, her "Dora the Explorer" hairstyle bouncing, wearing a smile that could potentially light the darkest place on earth – prison.

When Helen was in rehab at her lowest, her heart opened when participants and workers started greeting her by name. She felt seen, which was new to her. This experience allowed her to come out of her shell and assisted her with her quest to spread smiles and greetings to the world.

Helen said, full of eagerness, "I like names and I am interested in the

"I give what I want in return," Helen said. "Every time I get greeted it feels like a giant hug."

person that was given that name. Once I hear a name, I log it in."

Greeting someone by their first name may seem small, but it has a powerful effect on both mental health and relationships. It helps people feel recognized and valued.

When someone hears their name, it shows that you see them as an individual rather than just another person.

Resident Patricia Lane spoke about Helen with endearment and shared her experience with her. "No matter what kind of day Helen has, it's all about making sure you know that you matter to her," Lane said. "In a place where I feel so lonely, she makes me feel seen, important, and

that I matter."

Helen greets you every time she sees you; it doesn't matter if she saw you five minutes ago, and it doesn't matter if it's 10 times after that.

When asked why the repetition, she dreamingly said, "I might not see them after today, so I cherish them every time I see them." It makes Helen happy to get the response back. "I give what I want in return," Helen said. "Every time I get greeted, it feels like a giant hug."

She considers all the people she meets good people and her friends. "All people are good people," Helen said. "And when they do bad, I don't see them as bad. They just did a bad thing."

One of her roommates, Yvette Vasquez, talked about the enormous amount of energy Helen expends to take care of others. "She goes above and beyond," Vasquez said. "I tell her all the time, what you do for others do for yourself."

Helen takes pride in knowing a lot of names. She immediately started reciting names that she knew, and would have kept going had I not interrupted her: Kristin, Nora, Teri, Gina, Big Mama...

Haley Neto, another of Helen's roommates, disclosed that she has never met anyone like Helen. "The first thing Helen does when she wakes up in the morning is to say 'Good Morning, Everyone!'" Neto said. "And then we get an individual good morning with our name attached to it."

Helen wants to be remembered as peaceful and happy, even though she is sad to be leaving people behind that can't go home yet.

"I like the people I have met here; I feel free already and I don't feel alone," Helen said.

Doing the Right Thing

What a day in the laundry room taught me about the importance of integrity

By Mimi Le

I was in the laundry room in building 507 one day waiting for my dryer to stop spinning when I heard a strange clinking sound.

I opened the dryer and on the ledge of the door was a gold band with diamonds. I did not recognize the ring at all. It definitely did not belong to me, so I slipped it onto my finger

and continued the dryer cycle.

Seconds later I heard more distinctive clinking coming from the dryer.

I opened the door again and took out all of the clothes one single piece at a time. In the drum of the dryer, I discovered a pair of earrings. I put them into my pocket and started the dryer.

I knew the jewelry did not belong to me, so as a friend of mine came into the laundry room, I presented the jewelry and asked if she knew who it belonged to. She said she knew the potential owner and would hold onto it so the owner could later retrieve it.

As a new resident to this general population building, I felt this was the best route to go to discover the rightful owner of the missing jewelry.

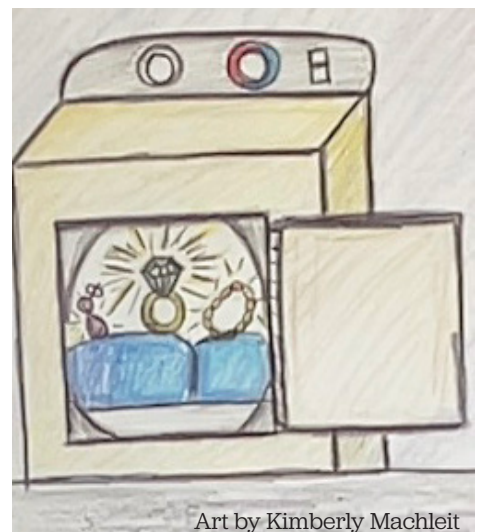
Finders keepers, losers weepers

is not only a childhood rhyme, it is also a fact of life. Especially here at CCWF: sometimes we misplace our items and they disappear forever only to reappear in someone else's possession.

The following day, I locked eyes with an associate of mine and she very seriously asked, "Are you the one that helped me?" I said, "Yeah, that was me. I wasn't sure who the jewelry belonged to but I wanted to make sure it got back to the right person."

She fell into my arms and wept. Crying, "Thank you so much! This kind of thing doesn't happen in prison."

Her emotional reaction surprised me. She had been used to people doing the wrong thing and behaving selfishly that the thought someone would act with integrity was beyond her expectations.



Art by Kimberly Machleit

I told her, "You shouldn't have expected anything different."

Ghandi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Today, there are a lot of people that choose to live a life of integrity.