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**Restoration and Renewal:  
Potential for Arts-in-Corrections in California  
Updated: August, 2013**

Overcrowding in California's state prison system has reached crisis proportions, resulting in federal receivership and a U.S. Supreme Court mandate to reduce overcrowding in the state's correctional facilities. To address this problem, Governor Brown achieved a realignment of the prison system—which will mean sending thousands of state prisoners to county jails. Funds for services for the expanded population in the county jails were negotiated in the budget process. California Lawyers for the Arts is working with the William James Association and California Arts Advocates on efforts to restore arts in corrections programs by incubating a number of model projects, developing new evaluation information and distributing information about the value of these programs. The goal of this project is to restore the state's robust arts-in-corrections program as a significant resource for rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism.

In collaboration with the William James Association, we received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the San Francisco Foundation, the Wallace A. Gerbode Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the California Arts Council in order to begin a demonstration project building the case for state-wide restoration of California's Arts-in-Corrections programs. We are working with Dr. Larry Brewster of the University of San Francisco to develop a “pre and post” evaluation process which will yield new information about the effectiveness of arts in corrections programs. In addition, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has pledged in-kind support for program coordination in the state prison system.

We have reached out to local arts agencies throughout California with information and a webinar providing technical assistance to let them know about this new opportunity to expand their services for disadvantaged persons. Our goal is to provide resources, including background information, training tools and proposal templates for local arts agencies that are interested in facilitating arts programs in the county jails and state prison facilities. This is the time to approach county Sheriffs, state prison superintendents, probation officers and others with suggestions that they offer arts services as part of the rehabilitation and reentry services they will provide to inmates. For example, WJA met with the Sheriff of Santa Cruz County, as well as representatives of the County Office of Education, to gain their support for such programs. Similarly, the Fresno Arts Council convened a meeting with the Sheriff of Fresno Arts Council to discuss the potential of arts programs in the county jail and transition programs.

Artists of all disciplines, including performers, writers, media and visual artists as well as artists working in the environmental realm, can serve as creative mentors and teachers for those persons who are able to turn their lives around but currently lack the tools to do so. Through the arts, inmates learn how to work, building their self-esteem and dignity, essential qualities for a successful life after incarceration.

With the support of the CDCR, we are now implementing the new demonstration project at selected facilities around the state. We have placed artists at San Quentin, New Folsom and Soledad Prisons. Additional data has been collected from residents working with Marin Shakespeare at San Quentin, and with Tim Robbins and his colleagues from the Actors Gang at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco.

The results so far have been encouraging. Arts programs engage prisoners' minds and hearts, offer a way for them to express emotions and reveal their own humanity to their peers. Discipline, emotional regulation, tolerance, teamwork, focus on goals, flexibility and empathy for others are consistent outcomes of engagement across arts disciplines. Increasing self-awareness leads to insights that fuel desires for a better future and for those who are released, a hopeful new chapter for themselves, their families and our communities.



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## Arts-in-Corrections Project

### Page Two

The William James Association, a nationally funded organization providing training and technical assistance for arts-in-corrections programs, is working to develop classes in visual, literary and performing arts. Through its mediation program, California Lawyers for the Arts is developing short programs that include conflict resolution and restorative justice elements that can be included in the menu of arts programs. California Arts Advocates, the state's advocacy organization for the arts, is committed to helping with developing public support for the renewal of arts-in-corrections.

### Background:

The California Arts Council (CAC) eliminated its national model Artist in Residence Program (AIR) in 2003-04 when the agency's general fund allocation was reduced by 94% (from \$18 million to \$1 million). This significant program—the agency's oldest—placed artists in schools, nonprofit organizations, units of government, senior centers, hospitals, Boys & Girls Clubs, correctional centers and tribal governments. In addition, the agency maintained interagency agreements with the CDCR and the California Youth Authority (CYA) that funded administrative positions to support Artist Facilitators across the system; those agreements ceased with the funding reduction. Though the CDCR continued to support a limited number of Artist Facilitators, funding for these positions was recently eliminated as well.

Lack of rehabilitation programs in the state of California has resulted in the country's highest recidivism rate, estimated at 70% within three years of release. A cost/benefit analysis by Lawrence G. Brewster, Political Science Professor at San Jose State University, for the William James Association and the Department of Corrections, concluded in 1983 that arts in corrections programs provide economic benefits for the Corrections Department, such as reduced costs of disciplinary administration, as well as better parole outcomes for ex-offenders. Because inmates who have been engaged in arts programs are less likely to return to prison, this program will pay for itself and even reduce overall costs of corrections going forward. The full report is available at

[http://www.williamjamesassociation.org/reports/Brewster\\_report\\_full.pdf](http://www.williamjamesassociation.org/reports/Brewster_report_full.pdf)

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