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A Qualitative Evaluation of the California Arts-in-Corrections Program

Larry Brewster

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September 2010

Brian's life shattered when he was arrested, convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to fifteen years in prison at the California Medical Facility in Vacaville. At the time of his arrest, he was a successful account executive for a large electronics company in Sacramento, California. His fall from the world's main stream to the cold, drab depths of prison life was abrupt. His former "straight" lifestyle had not prepared him to cope with the hard edged realities of prison.

Struggling to get a foothold in the prison pecking order, he fell deeper and deeper into the lifestyle and "survival of the baddest" mentality of the hardcore prisoners. A drug teetotaler before his incarceration, Brian learned about mainlining "crank" and "smack" from his fellow inmates. He learned about prison gangs and games like harassing prison punks and sissies. He began fitting in too well. "I was getting into a subculture I didn't want to be in," Brian said, while rolling up his sleeves to show the indelible marks that subculture left on his body--dark, angry, hand-size tattoos covering his biceps. "I was sitting back doing nothing," he said. "I was looking at doing a lot of time. I was going downhill fast, depressed and lost in a world that was alien to me." (Interview, 8/12/09)

Brian is now out of prison and working. He attributes his survival inside the walls and his eventual success on the outside to the California Arts-in-Corrections program. Brian tells it this way. "Prison arts was a salvation for me." Wanting to escape the uglier side of prison life, he

asked fellow inmates and prison officials for help and they directed him to Arts-in-Corrections. The program, he found, was one of the few places his desire to better himself fit in. Today Brian considers himself an artist, even as he makes his living as support staff in a medium sized company. He became expert in the lost wax technique of metal sculpture. He creates brass sculptures and sells them to augment his income. "I'm not religious at all, but getting involved with Arts-in-Corrections was akin to being a born again Christian. I did good time when I joined the program, became a model prisoner, and continue my art now that I'm a free man. Doing my time in prison became easier and more meaningful as I studied sculpting and mastered my art. I am forever grateful." (Interview, 8/12/09)

Cole was sentenced to prison for second degree murder in his eighteenth year of life. He is nearing forty and hopes one day to work with at-risk youth. At the age of twenty-nine and in his twelfth year of incarceration he signed up for Arts-in-Corrections in search of greater opportunities to better himself. He already had found Buddhism and was taking lower division college courses. He writes, "if I wanted something more in my life, even while in prison, I had to get off my ass and take a risk. I would like to say I knew what I was doing and that I wasn't scared, but that would be a lie." (Personal letter, 7/10/09) Through the program he learned he could paint quite well and that he was a gifted writer.

"A forty-three year old biker from San Diego serving a life sentence gave me my first set of acrylic paints. AIC held annual art auctions to benefit local charities. We chose to support the Antelope Valley Children's Center. Every painting we produced, we gave away to the auctions. I never thought that painting could lead toward self-awareness,

but the practice of spending hundreds of hours on a painting only to give it away to benefit others really bit deep into my closely held selfishness.

Through Arts-in-Corrections, I began to interface with members of the public. The artists who came in to teach various classes brought with them their own brands of outreach, and these classes became like a therapy for me. One teacher used painting and drawing to teach patience and perseverance. The blank white canvas can intimidate even the most confident artist, and the problems that arise in every painting must be solved with patience and an emotional learning component that only can be accessed through the creative experience. Later, I discovered that I had a knack for teaching, and in the budgetary deserts of the last decade, I have consistently taught beginning and intermediate painting and drawing to other prisoners." (Personal letter, 7/10/09)

Art in one form or another always has been a part of prison life. Tattoos, music, novels, poetry, plays and political treatises come to mind. What is new to the prison experience beginning in the 1970s is formal arts programming designed to meld the creative impulses of many inmates with the fine arts model of quality, inspiration, and discipline. While it is naive to believe that the creation of art alone markedly alters an inmate's value system, we know from experience that each step forward in the personal struggle for mastery and completion in the artistic process can be a small down payment in the progress towards a new and solid sense of respect for oneself and one's fellows.

The California Arts-in-Corrections Program

California was the first state to administer a professional arts program throughout the state's prison system. Arts-in-Corrections was the largest institutionally-based arts program in the country. The program was supported by state dollars from the budgets of the California Department of Corrections (Rehabilitation was added to its title in 2003, the same year funding for the program was significantly reduced), the California Arts Council, and by foundation grants administered through the William James Association, a nonprofit based in Santa Cruz, California. The program founders, Eloise and Page Smith, envisioned that only working, professional artists would administer and teach in the program. They believed inmate-artists would benefit both from the expertise of working artists and as examples of achievement. Simply put, the Smiths thought it essential that inmate art students be exposed to professional artists as models of commitment, hard work, self-discipline and independence.

Eloise, herself an artist, imagined the prison art class as a place where possibility, choice and skill are rewards for those who accept personal responsibility for their own artistic success or failure. Arts-in-Corrections inmates had to commit to a work personified by the persistence and quality of the artists who came to share their skills. Through their hard work and guidance from their instructors, inmates learned, and the more they learned the greater their investment in the triumph or failure of their efforts. For many inmates this was a new experience. For some, the opportunity to experience the exercise of creativity opened a door, albeit often a back door, to the development of a personal sense of self-worth which is quite different from the one being imposed upon them behind the walls.

The idea behind Arts-in-Corrections was conceived in 1975 when Verne McKee, an inmate at the California Medical Facility, a state prison in Vacaville, California, had a chance meeting with Eloise Smith, who at the time was director of the newly formed California Arts Council. She was at the prison to judge an inmate art show, and McKee asked her whether there was some way she could help get professional artists to teach inmates inside the prison. That conversation set in motion events which led first to a small, grant-funded experiment at Vacaville and administered by the William James Association, then to a Department of Corrections funded project at six facilities, and finally to a state-wide program which earned national acclaim for artistic achievement and for a remarkable influence on inmate behavior. The experiment offered Eloise the opportunity to test her hypothesis that an inmate could improve his self-esteem and thus, his behavior, by replacing his lost physical freedom with an inner freedom gained through the discipline and rewards of art. She proposed a curriculum in the visual, literary and performing arts which would "provide an opportunity where a man can gain the satisfaction of creation rather than destruction."

The three-year pilot program at Vacaville was called the Prison Arts Program (1977-1980). The program was renamed Arts-in-Corrections at the time it received state funding and expanded to other prisons. AIC enjoyed a successful run from 1980 to 2010, when the California State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation eliminated the program in partial response to the ongoing state budget crisis.

The primary mission of Arts-in-Corrections was to provide inmates with diverse opportunities to perfect their artistic skills and personal vision through instructional workshops

in the arts taught by professional artists who exemplified the fine arts model of quality, discipline and inspiration. Through the artistic process, with its focus on creative problem-solving and mastery of various art disciplines, it was expected that inmates would develop positive self-images and increase their self-esteem. Furthermore, inmates were encouraged to communicate through their art with the outside community by participation in community-service projects and victim's rights workshops. The program also offered inmates meaningful work incentive positions. (Brewster 1983)

To the extent possible, AIC classes were run as if the setting were an art school, not a prison. Inmates in poetry class, for example, published anthologies and chap books. Musicians and actors put on productions for audiences at the institution. Painters submitted their works for consideration in juried contests and exhibition. During AIC's thirty year run, several thousand inmates received tens of thousands of hours of art instruction from hundreds of artist-instructors. Other benefits were derived from the establishment of institutional beautification and community service art projects, including annual fundraisers in support of children whose parents are incarcerated.

Program Evaluations: 1983 and 1987

While it is difficult to measure the impact art programs have on social institutions, nevertheless, efforts have been made to evaluate the California Arts-in-Corrections program. This author conducted a cost-benefit analysis of AIC in 1983. The study found the program to be cost-effective as measured in societal, taxpayer and individual benefits. (Brewster 1983). Furthermore, there was a significant reduction in disciplinary actions among the inmates

participating in the program (between 75% and 81% reductions in prison infractions depending on the facility). Most corrections officials interviewed for the study were supportive of the program primarily because it resulted in dramatic reductions in prison infractions such as violent behavior and drug taking.

By 1987, there was a sufficient number of ex-cons who had participated in the program to justify a study of the program's effect on parole outcomes. The study compared a sample of AIC participants with all California Department of Corrections parolees. Results showed that the AIC participants had a significantly higher percentage of favorable outcomes than the CDC total population studied for the same time periods. For example, six months after parole, Arts-in-Corrections participants showed an eighty-eight percent rate of favorable outcome as compared with seventy-two percent rate for other CDC parolees. One year after parole, those who had participated in Arts-in-Corrections had a favorable rate of seventy-four percent while that for CDC parolees was only forty-nine percent. Two years after release, sixty-nine percent of the AIC ex-cons retained their favorable status in contrast to forty-two percent for all other parolees. (William James website)

Qualitative Evaluation of AIC

Arts-in-Corrections is thirty-years old and in that time thousands of inmates have participated in the program, and many have left prison and returned to their communities. In 2008-2009 in-depth interviews with former AIC inmates were conducted in an effort to evaluate the impact of the program on their lives while incarcerated and since their release. We wanted to learn if the program positively influenced their self-esteem, work ethic, and self-

identity. Although it was never the goal of AIC to prepare inmates to make a living through their art, nevertheless some earn at least a partial living through their art and many others continue to work at their art.

Twenty male and two female ex-cons were interviewed. Three classes held at San Quentin State Prison--writing, print making and painting--were observed and participating inmates were interviewed. The interviews averaged one-and-a-half hours. The participants ranged in age from thirty-seven to sixty-four. The crimes committed included possession and sale of drugs; first-and second-degree murder; vehicular manslaughter (drinking and driving); robbery and sex offenses. The interviewees were incarcerated in one or more of the State prison facilities for a period of five to thirty-eight years, with a majority serving between eight and twelve years. All but one of the respondents has been out of prison for at least seven years, and two for more than fifteen years.

Most were first incarcerated in their late teens or early twenties and had been raised in dysfunctional families in poor or working-class neighborhoods. The interviewees included Hispanics, African-Americans, Caucasians and a Japanese woman. Two were college educated and older at the time of their incarceration. Several pursued other educational and vocational opportunities while incarcerated. Only three of the respondents were free of alcohol or drug addiction at the time of their arrest and conviction. A few of the musicians and two writers received formal training prior to their incarceration and participation in Arts-in-Corrections.

The men and women interviewed are a diverse group, although they are not a representative sample of former AIC inmates. They readily agreed to be interviewed with the

promise of anonymity. They were forthcoming about their personal and family histories, the reasons for their incarceration, and the impact of AIC on their lives.

The Findings

Working at Their Art: Self-Discovery and Esteem

I heard over and over again from the ex-cons and current inmates that Arts-in-Corrections taught them how to work at their art with a sense of purpose and focused discipline. The ultimate prize for most of these men and women was earned self-respect, human dignity, self-esteem, and self-discovery. They attribute much of their success to AIC and to other educational and training programs they pursued while in prison. They offer themselves as evidence that rehabilitation is possible. A surprising number of the interviewees (7) are earning a part or all of their living through their art. Their professions include magician, guitar, cello and violin makers, musicians, sculptor, writer and painter. One ex-con wrote to Claire Braz-Valenine, a long-time writing instructor in Arts-in-Corrections, thanking her and reporting on his success since leaving prison.

I took a course in writing at Soledad where you were an instructor. I would like to thank you! I have used the things you showed me to go on to a great career in the motorcycle industry. Much of the work I do involves writing ads and scripts for the sales department. I also have been doing some minor writing and have had three of my stories published. I now own my own home and will be starting a motorcycle shop next year. I took your classes in the mid-1990s and wouldn't expect you to remember me but I thought you might like to hear of 'one that got away!' (from the system that is...). I

truly believe you were partially responsible for my success. (Claire Braz-Valentine shared this letter on the condition the author remain anonymous.)

Jake, an African-American raised on the mean streets of East Los Angeles, learned sculpting while inside and now makes his living as a sculptor. He explained what the artistic process meant to him while incarcerated.

When you are doing your art, you don't care if you are locked down for months if you have materials and your imagination. When you work at your art, you are meditating. You are focused, able to shut out the noise and fear of prison life. You turn off the monkey mind and you no longer think about the streets or fear or girls. You get focused and quiet all the chatter, because you have found another way to be free. That's what the Arts-in-Corrections and my art gave to me, another way to be free; to reach our calm state of mind. (Jake. Personal interview. 27 September 2008)

Megan was first sentenced in 1987 for possession of heroin, and embezzlement. Her life Her life spiraled out of control after the death of her seventeen year old daughter who died of Hodgkin's disease. Megan holds a Bachelor's degree in English from UC Berkeley and her father was Chair of English at a northern California state university. Until her daughter's death, Megan held well-paid and highly responsible positions in business. Her dream, however, was to write. Unfortunately, her father's critical and disapproving nature intimidated her, preventing her from putting pen to paper. Ironically, her incarceration and involvement in Arts-in-Corrections enabled Megan to find her voice as a writer.

She beautifully expresses a longing for the approval and love of her father in an untitled poem she wrote and published as a student in the AIC program.

When I was pre-preschool, I told my father that I loved him

He replied, "Likewise, I'm sure."

I told my father that if I was rich, I would give him all my money.

He replied, "It is--if I **were** rich, Megan."

Late one night, I crept into my parents' bedroom and whispered,

"Daddy, I snuck in here to kiss you good night."

He replied, "There is no such word as **snuck**."

Remember, Megan, **sneak** and **sneaked**."

I don't tell my father I love him anymore, and likewise I'm sure.

If I were rich, I would undoubtedly give the connection all my money.

And about **snuck**...I still **sneak** it in every once in awhile. (Silva 45)

At an early age, Leon, expected to end up in prison like his father, two uncles and so many other Black brothers from his south Los Angeles hood. He not only expected to go to prison, but looked forward to it. He romanticized prison as a place where men earned their badges of courage and respect. His role models served time and it was expected that he would do the same. He did. He served over twenty years, during which time he eventually decided he wanted a better life for himself and his seven children. He wanted to teach his children that there is another and better life than the one he and his father and uncles had lived. Over time, Leon started reading, taking college courses, participating in a twelve-step program and a peer counseling group. His changed attitude and determination to better himself led him to spend more time alone, avoiding trouble as much as possible on the inside. Eventually, Leon

discovered Arts-in-Corrections and through the program he discovered his talents as a song writer, playwright, actor and painter.

Leon co-wrote and acted in two plays, composed several rap songs and discovered his talent for drawing and painting as a student in the program. Since his release nearly four years ago, he has completed a novel, co-wrote and acted in a play and continues to write songs and paint--all of this while working a full time job to support his wife and several children. He talked about the satisfaction he receives from completing projects, and the importance of teaching his children that they too can do anything they set their mind to as long as they are willing to work hard and finish what they started.

"Arts-in-Corrections taught me above all else the importance of completing projects. I think one of the problems with young people today is that they don't finish what they start. They may get interested in something but often don't follow through. I was like that for most of my life. But not anymore. I've learned with the help of others, especially the art instructors, how satisfying it is to complete tasks and get better at my art in the process.

For example, I've worked hard to get better at my writing and drawing. I decided a few years ago to set myself a writing schedule. My goal is to write three pages a day. Some days I might be on a roll and complete ten pages, and other days maybe only one page gets written. But at least that is one more page than I had the day before. That's how I managed to write my first novel and it feels really good to have finished that project. I don't know if it is any good, but a few of my friends have read it and liked it. My

satisfaction comes in knowing that I wrote a book. My children call me a writer and actor. They saw me in a play I co-wrote and after the show my little girl said, "daddy, you're an actor." It makes me feel good as a person and father and I'm forever grateful to the Arts-in-Corrections program for helping me to develop my talents and, more important, for teaching me how to work. (Leon. Personal interview. 3 October, 2010)

Doing Time

Each of us struggles to live fulfilling lives no matter our circumstances. We search for meaning and strive each day to accomplish something, anything. In one sense, "we're all doing time," in the words of Bo Lozoff. He writes in his book of the same title that it's not the external trappings of our lives that set us free; rather the enduring qualities of courage, passion, kindness, discipline, self-esteem, honor, and respect. How we choose to use our time, whether we live in luxury or are locked away in prison, determines who we are and what we will become.

The ex-cons interviewed reported without exception that Arts-in-Corrections changed what it meant "to do time" as they worked at their art. You will recall that Jake described how art was meditation for him and it served to turn off the "monkey mind." Later in our conversation, he told me that he often would awake early in the morning with an idea or vision of what he wanted to create that day and then would proceed to work on the piece until it was done. In his words:

I could start early in the morning, seven o'clock, working on a sculpture and stop at seven that night, twelve hours later, and I would still be sitting in my boxer shorts at the

table with a mess of soap or some other material, and I look at the time and say to myself, 'Man, I feel like I just work up'...because you have no concept of time. My body would be totally relaxed and I would feel good about what I had made that day." (Jake. Personal interview. 27 September 2008)

Others told similar stories as they worked on their music, wrote their stories and poems, or painted. They described how as artists they needed time to perfect their work, and time was the one resource they had in abundance. Ray mentioned that other inmates would tease him, saying "Ray, you're not going to have time to do your writing on the outside like you do in here, you'll have to get a real job." (Ray. Personal interview, 6 October 2008) They were right, he said. Even so, he sees himself as a writer and the writing program helped preserve his sanity. "The perception of time," observed Russ, "is a very important thing. You know, prison time can be a monster, it is oppressive. That changed for me while I was in my art classes, or working at my art in my cell. Time never went as fast as it did during those times when I was focused not on me, or my surroundings, but on my art." (Russ. Personal interview, 16 July 2008)

Chris spoke at length of how Arts-in-Corrections helped him do his time. "Oh yeah, I counted on going to classes and working on my art in the evenings and in my cell. It provided a space in which to escape daily prison life. When I was working on my art I didn't have to think about all the other stuff. It was just me and my art." (Chris. Personal interview, 16 August 2008)

All agreed that Arts-in-Corrections helped to keep guys from getting into trouble.

The musicians spoke longingly about playing music together with their bands, practicing long hours to perfect their techniques and, in some cases, their song writing. James recalled that the music program felt like a

breadth of normalcy...because we were in this trailer (Soledad) making fine music, Vivaldi and Bach and stuff and right outside, you could hear the clanking of the weight pile. It was right outside the door, and inside the trailer you are playing beautiful classical music...really fine music...you welcome the relief from the realities of prison life. (James. Personal interview, 20 October 2008)

Creating a Safe Haven, Bridging the Racial Divide

Prisons are dangerous places, made more so by overcrowding, racial segregation and gangs. An unwritten rule of prison life is that inmates are to hang with their own group--defined by racial, geographic and gang affiliations. The racial dynamic in prisons dictates that people of the same race band together to protect each other from predators. Simply put, race lines are stark and prison politics requires that inmates remain loyal to their own kind.

An exception to this rule may be found inside Arts-in-Corrections' classrooms and art studios. Those interviewed recalled that they found themselves working alongside men of different races, many for the first time in their lives. I observed this in my classroom visits as well. For example, the nine men in the San Quentin writing class were engaged in a lively, informed and thoughtful critique of that week's assigned reading. The men didn't always agree with one another, but they expressed their points of view with civility, mutual respect and even

humor. These men were African-American, Caucasian and Hispanic. Their love of writing bonded them despite their racial differences.

R. F. Gilliam, a student in the San Quentin writing program, wrote:

Once a week I sit at a table surrounded by the dregs of society; men banished to a grim Purgatory; men I didn't know three years ago. I sit with them and bare my soul through the words I've written, awaiting their judgment. These men are all convicted criminals, as am I, who have committed robberies, burglaries, and murder. I share my thoughts and creativity with them because they, like me, yearn to make something more of our existence. They dream of becoming more than the sum of their crimes, more than the labels they've become in the eyes of others. Even though these men are criminals I have discovered all of them are intelligent, thoughtful individuals with unique experiences and perspectives on the world we live in. Their voices are the ones you don't hear in polite society; their stories reveal the darkness and demons we all wrestle with, some more successfully than others. These men, who speak from experience of broken homes, abusive relationships, and of life lived on the gritty streets inhabited by gangbangers, drug addicts, hookers and hustlers have helped me to grow as a person, and to expand my horizons. Although they never ask it, I thank these men for their sharing, and it is with equanimity and humility they accept my praise as they struggle to become something more than they are, through writing, as do I. That's what this program means to me; a chance to redeem myself in the eyes of society, and in my own.

(Personal letter, February 2009)

James, Robert and Larry, Caucasian, African-American and Hispanic respectively, profoundly influenced one another through AIC despite their racial differences. Robert first took an interest in the guitar program while watching James build one. Robert in turn became the teacher to Larry who, to this day, considers Robert his greatest positive role model and friend. When asked about race and prison, Robert explained that

it is all about survival. You're thrown into prison at a young age and you quickly learn that you can't shake this guy's hand or sit in a certain part of the yard...it's very easy to get caught up in prison politics and racial divisions. The art program took me out of that scene. It showed me something different inside prison. It allowed me to communicate with people without being so conscious of their race or affiliation. (Robert. Personal interview, 31 October 2008)

Russ described it this way.

...in the AIC classroom we could sit and kick around ideas. When you're on the yard there's a certain mindset. As much as you think you can ignore it, that mindset permeates everything and everyone in prison. You just never know what's going to happen...but when you're in the art room, everybody's mindset is locked into doing their art, and offering help to the other guys. We can forget being the touch guy. You know, forget doing the rooster thing. It is safe to kick ideas around...'Hey, what about this lick [if you're a musician]? What colors did you mix together to get that scene in your painting? What, pastel?: Oh man, are you using a thesaurus when you're writing? How're you getting this--how are

you finding this stuff man? Of course you are in prison and you never know what's going to jump off, you never know. Still, locked in a classroom with the teachers and fellow artists...it's a beautiful thing. (Russ. Personal interview, 16 July 2008)

Reconnecting with Family

Children pay the price for their parents' crimes. The impact of incarceration on families is devastating and is a national family crisis. The rate at which women (many of whom are mothers) are incarcerated in this country has significantly increased since the 1970s. When a mother is incarcerated even for a short time, her children are placed in foster care. Some call this the "baby snatching era", resulting in the greatest separation of families since slavery.

Families, and especially children, must also deal with feelings of shame and social stigma. Imprisonment is not a reason for celebration, nor a reason to be proud. Many families do not tell even their closest friends about a relative's incarceration and often go to great lengths to protect the inmate's children from the consequences of revealing this family secret. There is compelling evidence that the incarceration of parent(s) often leads to a child's lowered self-esteem, depression, and anti-social behavior.

A few of the men interviewed spoke poignantly of how Arts-in-Corrections played an important role in helping them to remain connected with members of their families. Ray, for example, mentioned one inmate who told him, "You know what Ray? You're a blessing." When Ray asked why, the inmate answered, "because of you my grandmother is speaking to me again. When I sent the portrait of my daughter that you did for me to her for Mother's Day, it

softened her heart. She figured that my giving the picture to her showed that I really did care. You made it possible man." (Ray. Personal interview, 6 October 2008) Leon's children are benefiting from his dedication to writing, acting and painting. He is teaching his children by example that hard work and a passion for what you do pays dividends in enhanced self-esteem, confidence and a feeling of accomplishment. His children see him as an artist and not a convict. They are proud of him and he is able to tell them they, too, can be successful. He has a chance to break the generational cycle of incarceration in his family.

I had the opportunity to speak with Jake's and Robert's sons. They told me how their fathers' art served to open the channels of communication and was a source of pride. Robert described his family as "tight" and their communication remained open during his incarceration. His two boys were very young at the time of his arrest and conviction, and they were raised by his sister while he served his time.

What the Arts-in-Corrections program did, I think, is it gave me and my boys something to talk about in the visiting room...a topic of conversation other than the idle or awkward chit-chat you so often hear among families during visitation. We'd draw pictures on napkins and talk about fine art and my guitars and music. Because I was enrolled in other art courses, it wasn't just the guitars that we talked about. There was always something of interest that helped us to communicate and that made my boys proud of me...they could talk with their friends about how their dad made guitars and painted pictures...they showed their friends the guitars I made for them, and eventually

they learned to play as well. They tell me it helped erase the stigma of having their father in prison. (Robert. Personal interview, 13 October 2008)

Today, Robert's boys are young adults who learned to play on their father's first hand-made guitar. Robert's son, Tony, recalled that he "fell in love with playing the guitar through my dad's program. Before then I didn't have an interest in music. It changed my life and now I'm a musician and artist like my dad. Talking with dad about his art classes and what he was learning. It made it easier for me and my brother while he was in prison. I'm really proud of what my dad accomplished." (Tony. Personal interview, 13 October 2008)

Rehabilitation

You will recall that Cole decided at some point during his incarceration to change the direction of his life. He turned to Buddhism, enrolled in college courses, and discovered his talents as a painter and writer through Arts-in-Corrections. Cole believes every prison yard is filled with three types of convicts. He argues that there are those "who refuse to change and continue to engage in violence, criminal behavior, and drug abuse; those who want to change, and are making use of what meager programs are available; and, a larger group who are in the middle, who are easily influenced by whichever of the other two groups happen to be the dominant factor on the yard. Since fear is a highly motivating factor, the muddle in the middle tends toward disruption and chaos." (Personal letter. 9 September 2010) Cole and so many of the men and women who participated in Arts-in-Corrections clearly chose the path of self-improvement and change. They are proof that rehabilitation is possible and should be given every opportunity to take the path of discovery and redemption.

There are those who say that prisons are for punishment, and in fact, California's penal code states, "The purpose of incarceration is punishment." However, it is fairer to say that the purpose of incarceration is to protect public safety, and the method California chooses to accomplish this is punishment. For the past thirty years, California has aggressively practiced the toughest sentencing laws in the nation, and ensured that its prisons are institutions of punishment rather than of rehabilitation. What this led to is a system bursting at the seams, housing inmates at two hundred-eighteen percent (218%) capacity, and foundering in a wash of seventy percent (70%) recidivism. Treatment programs are rare, and where they do exist, they do so in an atmosphere not conducive to success.

Ironically, rehabilitation was added to the California Department of Corrections title in 2005, at a time when significant budget reductions and a reorganization negatively impacted Arts-in-Corrections and other educational programs. In 2010, Artist Facilitators lost their jobs to further budget cuts, effectively eliminating AIC altogether. In addition, seven hundred teachers who taught inside California's thirty-three prisons were laid-off, and significant reductions were made to vocational training and drug and alcohol treatment programs. In the thirty years that we have been tough on crime we have required little or nothing of inmates; they can simply sit in their cells or hang out on the yard if they choose. Where is the rehabilitation in that?

Arts-in-Corrections awakened the art spirit in thousands of convicts in its thirty year run, and in the process helped them to acquire skills and knowledge and, most important, to develop self-confidence, esteem, and a new identity as an artist and not just as a convict. The men and women in this study are examples of how art can lead to redemption and a healed

heart. Rick, a lifer at New Folsom prison, wrote a poem about rehabilitation and the artistic process that captures the sentiment of many of the Arts-in-Corrections' men and women.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is said to be a faded memory,
A lost thought that no longer occurs.
But I don't care what is said and I don't care what is thought,
Though it's true day after day and year after year
for years and years on end.
They tried to kill rehabilitation and creation
with condemnation and correction,
but year after year they still fail to obliterate the
passion of an artist's soul.
And I hear rehabilitation day after day and year after year.
I hear it in the scratching of pencils across paper.
I hear it in the newly formed notes of an instrument that still remains,
and I hear it boldly announced in the public's words
'To hell with rehabilitation, and yet I and many other artists
will not be denied the God-given gift to create and to dream,
to escape the confines of Corrections on the wings of our passion.
So when there is a flute, a pen, a paint brush, a guitar or any other artistic
paraphernalia in our hands, we are examples of rehabilitation--
no longer of condemning or correcting.
Rehabilitation is found in an artist's passion to create.
Rehabilitation lives. It lives in me and in every other artist who
in spite of this place still exercises the God-given gift to be an artist. ("Inmate
interviews")