



Dear ARC Family,

We hope you are staying safe during these uncertain times. Please know we are working to ensure your well being and safety going forward. You are not forgotten as we are thinking of you. Do not despair, as we are in contact with the Governor's Office and CDCR as we work to keep you safe. We need to work together now more than ever to create change.

During this pandemic, we want to hear from you, and know what life is like, so we can help amplify your voices and the current state of life inside prison. Please write to us, tell us what you're feeling, how you are coping, what needs to be done to keep you healthy and safe, and with any other concerns.

Please write to us at **ATTN: #Covid19 Submission**, 1320 E. 7th Street, Suite 260, Los Angeles, CA 90021. Please include your preferred name or if you would like to remain anonymous. Please also let us know if you would like your publication to include your CDCR Number and location.

Submissions may be used on ARC social media or posted on the ARC website, in addition to being eligible for the next Inside Newsletter. **Please note that your submission is not guaranteed** publication. We look forward to hearing from you. Please stay safe!

Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC)



ARC'S ED SAM LEWIS WITH BOARD MEMBER CHARITY AND SACRAMENTO KING'S HEAD COACH LUKE WALTON AT FOLSOM STATE PRISON, 2020

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A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SAM LEWIS

Greetings to my Brothers and Sisters behind the walls,

As we enter into 2020 I have thought greatly about what the future holds.... I have visited many prisons, and I have shared my personal story with many. Obtaining my freedom was not easy. 9 Parole Hearings and 24 years inside with little to no hope of ever being free. I've been home now for 8 years, and I still take time to listen to music, watch the sun rise and set. To admire the beauty of a rose and listen to the playful laughter of children on my block.

It is my hope that every person in prison has the opportunity to do these things and so much more. I have committed life to making this a reality.

There are thousands of people on the outside working to make the criminal justice system better. Mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, celebrities, legislators, and formerly incarcerated people like me. We are fighting to make this system fair and more humane. We have made great progress, and many have come home. However, there is still a great deal of work to do, and we need your help.

I know and understand the prison environment, and the culture. I'm asking you can we change that? Can we work together to shift the culture from a culture of violence and hopelessness to a culture of peace and hope? What happens behind the walls in the belly of the beast has a direct effect on how people view us. It has an effect on the work we are doing to change laws and make this system more humane.

When more and more people see college graduations, GED graduations, and Self-Help graduations they see that redemption is possible and they begin to believe in redemption and second chances. The exact opposite is also true. When people see or read about violence in our system, they become frightened of the people that are in prison, and the narrative tends to be negative towards the people inside prisons. Help us change this narrative. Help us to show the world that redemption is possible and that everyone should have a second, third, and even a fourth chance.

We can't do this without you. We need your help to change the narrative and bring you all home.

Sincerely,

SAM LEWIS IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ANTI-RECIDIVISM COALITION (ARC). A FORMER LIFE PRISONER, SAM UNDERSTANDS THE VARIOUS OBSTACLES THE PRISON AND REENTRY POPULATIONS FACE. IN 2017, SAM CREATED THE HOPE AND REDEMPTION TEAM (HART), A GROUP OF NINE FORMER CALIFORNIA LIFE PRISONERS WHO GO BACK INTO CALIFORNIA STATE PRISONS TO PROVIDE HOPE, DEMONSTRATE THAT REDEMPTION IS ACHIEVABLE, AND TO PREPARE PARTICIPANTS FOR SUCCESSFUL REENTRY INTO OUR COMMUNITIES



POLICY UPDATE 2020

The ARC Policy team is excited to bring you an update on our 2020 policy priorities! ARC works alongside local and statewide advocacy organizations to create opportunities for our members to lend their expertise and voices to criminal justice reform efforts in California. Learn about our important policy updates below!

ACA 6: This constitutional amendment will restore the right to vote to 50,000 people on parole. Last year it passed in the Assembly and is now on its way to the Senate for a vote in the Spring. If the Senate passes ACA 6, the issue will be placed on the November 2020 ballot for the voters of California to decide.

Status: ACA 6 will be heard in the Senate in Spring 2020

SCR 69: This resolution acknowledges that incarcerated workers are drastically underpaid for their labor. Their earned wages don't allow them to fulfill financial obligations, such as restitution, fines, fees, and child support. **A resolution does not mean that there will be any legislative changes on this issue this year.** However, it does mean that the California legislature recognizes that this is a problem. We are laying the groundwork for this resolution to become a bill within the next couple of years.

Status: SCR 69 passed the Senate floor, and will head to the Assembly next.

If SCR 69 impacts you, please write to us in detail.

- Tell us what jobs you have held and the duties of each job?
- What products or services do you produce or make?
- How much do you earn per hour? Did the amount ever increase or decrease?



- How would an increased wage help you to pay off restitution, child support, other debts, and help you better prepare for reentry?
- Why is being paid a fair wage important to you?
- Anything else you would like to say?

SB 776 Post-Secondary Education: ARC and partners are working on a bill this year that would disallow post-secondary institutions in California to conduct background checks at any point during the admissions process. For many ARC members, access to higher education has been a vital part of successful reentry. It's important to us to ensure that education is accessible to all, regardless of conviction history.

Status: SB 776 passed the Senate floor, and will head to the Assembly next.

AB 2342: ARC is continuing our efforts to reform parole with AB 2342. This year will introduce a bill about Community Reintegration Credits, which will allow people on parole to earn credits, similar to Proposition 57. By incentivizing people on parole to continue their rehabilitation through education, self-help programs,

volunteering, and staying disciplinary-free, we are promoting public safety through their success.

Status: AB 2342 will be introduced in the Assembly soon

SB 1111: Senate Bill 1111 seeks to protect transition-aged youth who have a case originating in juvenile court. By housing most 18 to 21-year-olds in youth facilities, not adult jails, SB 1111 will ensure a young person's continued education and treatment pending the outcome of a case. In addition, SB 1111 will protect transition-aged youth from the harms associated with holding young people in adult jails.

Status: This bill will be heard in the Senate Public Safety Committee soon

If you have any questions or policy ideas, please continue to call and write to us. Your insight and feedback is crucial to reforming our criminal justice system in California.

You may send mail to the LA or Sacramento offices, make sure to write: C/O ARC Policy.

Sincerely

ARC Policy Team

HOPE GROWS AT PELICAN BAY

By Jacob Brevard

In January, ARC celebrated our first wave of graduates from our Hope and Redemption (HART) program at Pelican Bay State Prison. Inside Program Director, Jacob Brevard shares his experience returning to Pelican Bay for the graduation, a place where he was incarcerated 28 years ago.

I'm back in Crescent City, California. Its lush forestry and beautiful beaches are absolutely breathtaking. The air is clean and fresh. I take a deep breath allowing the fresh coastal breeze to consume me.

I can't believe I'm going back inside Pelican Bay. My return will be bittersweet. My memories of Pelican Bay come from the early 1990's when I was incarcerated there. Thinking back on my time here, I can only recall brutality, violence, hate and despair. The dreary grey walls are imprinted in my mind as a reminder of the pain and misery of that place. A place where there was no hope, a place that we called, "the end of the world."

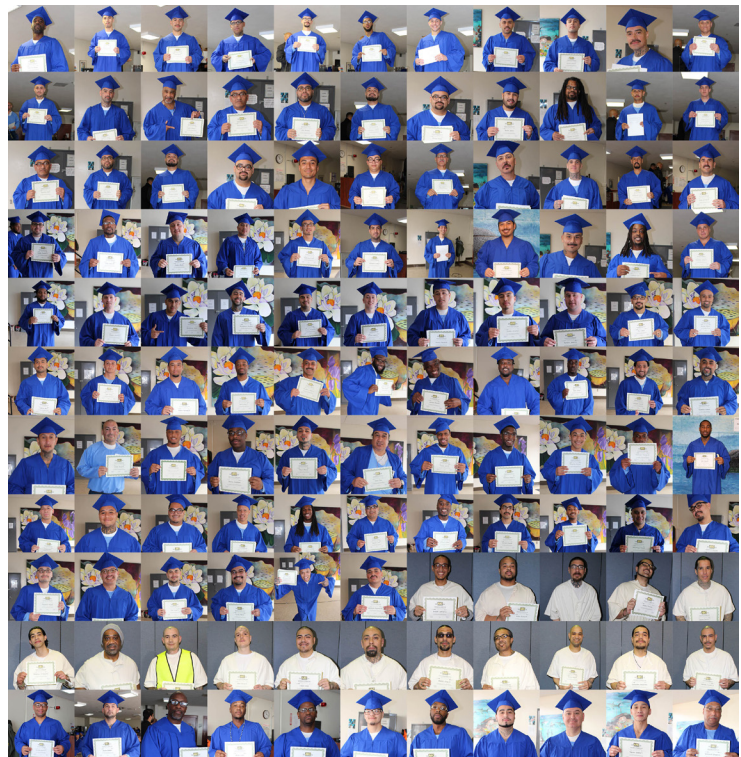
It's ironic that just like the men being housed there, Pelican Bay itself is also going through a major transformation. Today a different light permeates through Pelican Bay. The once dreary grey walls have been transformed with colorful and inspirational art. The brutality, violence, hate and despair have been replaced with hope and transformation. Even the California Department of Corrections' outlook has changed, in part, from punishment toward rehabilitation.

For the first time at Pelican Bay, 239 men are graduating from ARC's HART team groups. For many of these men, it will be the first time that they have ever completed and/or graduated anything. The first time that they will see value in their lives. The first time that their family will have an opportunity to experience them as responsible human beings. As we entered the visiting room and the men started filtering in for the ceremony, I could feel the positive energy flowing through the room. Family and friends exchanged hugs and greetings with the men before everyone settled into their seats to commence the graduation. The participants were dressed in caps and gowns.

The Warden spoke commending the men for their commitment to positive change. Sam Lewis gave an inspiring speech documenting his transformation. Then the graduates began to speak. They shared their struggles and their triumphs. One man bravely shared that he was transforming his life for his grandmother who recently passed away. Another man spoke about how his daughter and his grandkids are the inspiration for his change. The emotion of the room shifted as we laughed and cried with them. Family and friends energetically cheered as the flash of the camera documented the men receiving their certificates. The men wept as the people in their lives expressed how proud they were of them.

In moments like these, I think about a fruit tree. I have never seen an apple tree eat an apple nor have I seen a peach tree eat a peach. The fruit tree bears fruit to nourish the lives around it. In these moments, I realize that my life is not about me. My life is about the people in my life who love and care for me. They are nourished by my accomplishments and good deeds, as I am with theirs. The fruit that these men are bearing nourished everyone in attendance. We all left wanting to do better and be better people.

We can't do this without you. We need your help to change the narrative and bring you all home.



GRADUATION CLASS AT PELICAN BAY STATE PRISON

PLAY FOR JUSTICE: ACTIVATIONS WITH NBA TEAMS INSIDE PRISONS

By Josef Gray

This past December, ARC partnered with Represent Justice, an advocacy organization formed under the vision of Scott Budnick, to host a basketball game with the Sacramento Kings in Folsom State Prison.

Sacramento Kings coach, Luke Walton, along with other King's staff, joined some of the men inside of Folsom Prison for an hour-long game of basketball. Marvin Bagley III and Nemanja Bjelica were among the Kings players who coached the two teams.

Prior to the game, something even more monumental took place. Kings players and coaches sat down with some of the men inside of Folsom Prison for a roundtable discussion facilitated by our very own Executive Director, Sam Lewis. Formerly incarcerated men and women from ARC and Represent Justice participated in this intense discussion around changing the narrative and breaking down stigmas associated with system-impacted individuals.

Following this event, ARC and Represent Justice traveled to Wisconsin to hold a similar event with the men in Racine Correctional Institution in collaboration with the Milwaukee Bucks. The games are part of the Play for Justice initiative which aims to demand a fair legal system, dignity for system-impacted people, and an end to extreme sentencing.



SACRAMENTO KINGS COACH LUKE WALTON WATCHES AS JOSEPH KELLER, INCARCERATED AT FOLSOM, GOES UP TO THE HOOP

COMMON CONCERT AT CRC

By Robert Chavez

There I was, attending a concert unlike any other, the ninth Common concert inside a Correctional facility, this time presented by Represent Justice. Going in I did not know what to expect. A concert inside of a prison, one can only imagine the sight of it. Before the concert began, we sat in a circle surrounded by incredible people. Mostly men who are currently and formerly incarcerated. Then there was Common and our amazing allies. I sat there with a great sense of awe and humility. The feeling of awe came from listening to the words that were being spoken. Words that conveyed change, words that conveyed a deep understanding of the purpose of self and life. As each person spoke it was clear to see the strength and courage they possessed. To demonstrate such insight came from deep introspection. To find freedom from within oneself in a prison setting can often be challenging. However, it was obvious that these men are on the right path to re-enter society.

There was a time that I thought I would never have a chance to attend a concert. So as a former lifer this experience felt surreal. Walking out to the yard and seeing the huge stage in a prison was hard to grasp. As night approached, the base, the lights and the beat of the music seem to take a life of its own. As the music blasted men slowly filed in, within a few minutes there was about 3,000 men in the yard. I had heard that music has the power to connect people. As Common shared his lyrics through the mike the inspirational messages that he spoke were clear. The men and women inside are not forgotten, a deep conscious awakening to bring our brothers and sisters home is at forefront of our movements.

An electrifying chant filled the yard as the concert was nearing to an end. The night sky drizzled rain upon us as the yard chanted "ARC ARC ARC." As the chant died down the microphone was passed from hand to hand with yet another powerful message from ARC staff: "My name is Cesar Zuniga and I spent 25 years in prison and I Represent Justice." "My name is Jacob Brevard and I spent 25 years in prison and I Represent Justice." For it is paramount to understand that those of us who have experienced the system have a responsibility to change the system.

ARC CREATIVES FILMS AND MONOLOGUES AT CIW

On December 2nd, ARC Creatives was able to share in an incredibly moving event at California Institution for Women (CIW), with ARC's Women 4 Freedom and the artists in and outside of CIW who shared their work. The event opened with a screening of three short films written, produced, and performed by system impacted women. The films had been screened twice before, once at the premiere in June, and once at the Justice on Trial Film Festival, presented by A New Way of Life Reentry Project. However, the screening marked the first time the films were shown inside a correctional institution. Two of the three women who showed their films were formerly incarcerated at CIW, and one of them was able to attend the event and talk about their experience on stage prior to the screening.

Following the screening, there was a live reading of monologues by the five women inside CIW who wrote them. These works ranged from witty commentaries of the system to moving lessons about empowerment and rehabilitation, and everything in between. Thank you to everyone who participated for sharing your work with us, and making that night so powerful for so many people. We hope to continue ARC Creatives and to share this incredible work in other ways.



WOMEN 4 FREEDOM DURING THEIR PANEL APPEARANCE.

**ARC Creatives is a collective of system-impacted people dedicated to making transformative art. The Women 4 Freedom program began in late August 2017, as a way to support women in CIW and connect them to resources available through ARC and our partners. Once a month, they bring different guests and topics based on the needs and feedback of group participants.

ARC WOMEN'S HOLIDAY PARTY

The women of ARC got together for the last time in 2019, to celebrate the holiday season and each other. Each person was gifted a paint by numbers to paint- it was a paint and sip minus the alcohol- but with delicious apple cider and punch. Then each woman picked from a list an ice breaker to share with the group. Things got hilarious pretty fast, even with just the cider, when the group began to share stories about themselves, family adventures, and favorite moments. We closed the group by reminding ourselves what we are grateful for as the holiday always reminds us- most said friendship, family, or a combination of the two.



NORMA CUMPIAN, MANAGER OF WOMEN'S AND NON-BINARY

INSIDE VOICES

We are featuring work from people who are currently incarcerated. In this issue, we present to you a stunning poem and two illuminating pieces of short prose. We are proud to lift up the minds of people who are currently incarcerated. To submit, please see the guidelines on the back page.

I Miss My Enemy

By Benjamin Frandsen

Today I lost
my enemy
For fifteen years I fought him
fiercely—every
thought
breath
blot of ink
“I sentence you to state prison for life.”

Since then, I’ve
given all, checked
every box
every group class program session
I’ve run from fights
I would have
won—except
no one
wins a fight
My actions and restraint
one unified purpose
taking life
taking life from this sentence
“This panel finds you suitable for parole.”

Exultation, disbelief
an unexpected void
I was: life inmate
I am: life inmate
Soon: life inmate

I have been
my struggle
What is left
of the me before?
the me I will be?
Who am I
without this battle,
this purpose,
this enemy?

I am the heart
that drains the ink blood
from this pen
I think
that is enough

By Jessie Milo, #P40495 (3A05-147), CSP-Corcoran

I am more than the sum of my faults is a basic concept that allows us to see the good in ourselves. Many of us have guilt over our past but what is guilt good for if we don’t use it to motivate us to be better? It took many years of introspection and stripping away my old thinking patterns to become the person I am today and it often feels as if I am invisible to the world. I long to be seen, not for my bad choices, but for the new man I am today. The world I live in has never met this new me and that makes me sad, because in a way I haven’t met the world.

I grew up with jaded eyes in a crime-filled household, but today I see with new eyes and this is important because the lenses we use to look out into the world also affect how we look within and view ourselves. Years back I used to lay awake at night and question: was I born into this world just to commit a crime and die in jail? As a human who recognizes the miracle of life I have to believe that my life is worth more than to pass through this world like a ghost. I have to be worth more than my one shot at existence on this planet being defined by one crime that happened in seconds...I have to matter more than that...or perhaps that’s just my human ego who tells my soul that? This is the dilemma of being sentenced to die in jail as a young person. My heart still beats. I have value. *Don’t you see me, world?* is a question we ask ourselves in the dark and with every breath.

By Gerry “Cool Breeze” Johns

In search of answers related to my purpose for existence, I committed myself to various areas of study, critical thinking, understanding my strengths and ways in which to improve myself. As I continued to evolve, I revamped my belief system, separated myself from old friends and certain kinfolks who really didn’t have my best interest at heart. A few years after having embarked upon a new path, “I was united with the wife of my life” and such connection became the center of the turning point in my life.

The point I want to stress is this: “The key for solution” has always been inside of me waiting to be turned. It just took someone special to move me to commit. As with the Ancient African proverb “Know thyself,” there’s a limitless truth about the path of “self-transformation” and “self-realization” which encompass the attributes of knowing when to let go, better all aspects of your being, practice self discipline and confront problems head on.



DISTRICT ATTORNEY CANDIDATE TOWN HALL AT CSP-LAC

In January, ARC partnered with Healing Dialogue and Action (HDA) and CDCR to host a Los Angeles District Attorney candidate town hall inside California State Prison- Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles District Attorney candidates, Rachel Rossi and Geoge Gascón came inside Lancaster prison for a town hall discussion about their vision for the future of our criminal justice system. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office is the largest local prosecutorial agency in the United States and the Los Angeles County jail system is the largest in the United States by incarcerated population. We know the important role a District Attorney plays in the criminal justice system and we wanted them to understand the incarcerated people should have a voice at the table. The event was the first ever DA candidate town hall in an American state prison.



MEN AT LANCASTER WITH DA CANDIDATES ROSSI, ARC DIRECTOR SAM LEWIS AND GASCON. PHOTO BY: MARA TASKER

We co-hosted this event because we believe that you are valued members of our communities. We believe you should be heard by decision makers, both present and future. We also believe that survivors of crime should be centered because we know the immeasurable pain caused when lives are taken and communities are hurt.

Most of the questions came from currently incarcerated men who have been serving long sentences since their youth. Other questions came from family members who have lost loved ones to violent crime. We shared a space where everyone was heard and validated. The Town Hall was an example of what civic engagement looks like when we seek restorative justice as opposed to punitive justice. We witnessed civic engagement by citizens that are the most marginalized in our country.

We were honored to have incarcerated people in this space, asking questions, speaking their truth, and engaging with the candidates.

The questions asked by the men inside and the topics discussed by the candidates included, centering the humanity of people throughout the judicial process, programming that allows for increased positive interaction between LA DAs and currently incarcerated people, compassionate trauma-informed care from DA towards survivors of crime, DA approaches to individuals accused of crimes in their youth, the roles that DAs play in parole hearings, LA County jail conditions, prosecutorial practices that reduce racial inequality, and life without the possibility of parole sentences. The event spoke to your deep humanity and your right to civic engagement. It was a testament to the idea that justice should build community and bring people together, a testament to the idea that Justice Should Heal. We want to remind you that your voice, concerns, and experience should be listened to by elected officials as we work together to build a better justice system.

ARC SACRAMENTO AND ANGEL TREE

This past holiday season, ARC Sacramento celebrated with the children of our brothers and sisters from behind the walls.

The Sacramento ARC office partnered with Angel Tree and Bayside-Midtown to co host a Holiday Party for 126 children whose parents are currently incarcerated. During the party, each kid was able to receive a present that was specifically picked out by their mom or dad, and then presented by a member of Bayside. In addition to their presents, each family received a Christmas stocking stuffed by ARC members with toys, candy, coloring books, hot cocoa and more. The party also featured all-you-can-eat pizza, face paintings, holiday games, and gingerbread houses.

ARC Sacramento member, Blanca Ruiz-Thompson, who spearheaded this event, shared why it was so important to give the kids this experience: "I remember receiving a gift as a child when my dad was away in prison, and it meant the world to me just to know that my dad was still thinking about me and got me a gift, even while he was away." Before the day was over, all of the kids had an opportunity to create hand-made Christmas cards, which were mailed to their mom or dad along with a picture of them with Mr. & Mrs. Claus.

Anti-Recidivism Coalition
1320 E. 7th Street
Suite 260
Los Angeles, CA 90021



Founded in 2013, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) empowers formerly and currently incarcerated people to thrive by providing a support network, comprehensive reentry services, and opportunities to advocate for policy change. Through our policy advocacy, we are dedicated to transforming the criminal justice system so that it is more just and equitable for all people.

Our supportive services – which include case management, trauma-informed counseling, housing, education, employment training, and mentorship – ensure that those returning home are given the best chance to be healthy, whole members of their communities. Our programs, correspondence, and legislative work on behalf of currently incarcerated people create hope and a pathway to freedom for many who never thought freedom possible.

Masthead

Executive Director: Sam Lewis
Director of Inside Programs: Jacob Brevard
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Write to the Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Los Angeles: Anti-Recidivism Coalition, 1320 E. 7th Street Suite 260, Los Angeles, CA 90021
Sacramento: Anti-Recidivism Coalition, 1414 K Street, Suite 150, Sacramento, CA 95814

If you write ARC a letter, please include some general information that will assist us in determining how to best serve you, and that will aid ARC with their advocacy efforts. Please answer the following questions:

- Are you serving a determinate sentence, serving a life sentence, or a life without the possibility of parole sentence?
- Do you fall all under SB 394, SB260, SB261, AB 1308, SB 1391, SB 1437, AB 965 or Prop. 57?
- Have you had a suitability hearing? If so, how many have you had?

Also please keep ARC updated if you happen to transfer out of your current institution. This will ensure you continue to receive the ARC quarterly newsletter.

Submit to our Newsletter!

We want you to contribute to our next newsletter and submissions are now open! Tell us what inspires you, what your goals are, what gives you hope, or anything you would like to share with our community! Feel free to also write your commentary on public life or what's happening in the world at large

Please write to us at ATTN: Newsletter Submission, 1320 E. 7th Street, Suite 260, Los Angeles, CA 90021. Write the name you would like to be published under. Submissions may also be posted on the ARC website. Please note that your submission is not guaranteed publication. We look forward to reading your work!

Learn How You and Your Family Can Get Involved

The bills that ARC and other community-based groups throughout California are supporting this year are significant in that they help provide many of you with chances to return to your families, remove barriers to your employment once you return home, and ensure that young people never enter the juvenile / criminal justice systems. California legislators need to know that these bills are extremely important to their constituents. One of the ways that you can help these bills become reality is to encourage your families to contact their representatives and voice their support. They can find out who their representatives are by using the following website:

findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov

Once they find out who their representatives are, they simply have to contact them and voice their support. Your family members, loved ones and friends can contact their representatives through phone calls and social media, as well. Please encourage your friends and loved ones today!