

A New Leaf: The Benefits of Arts Education in Prisons



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Senior Honors Thesis

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While scholars and educators argue that students who participate in arts programs are more disciplined and are more likely to graduate, the benefits of an arts education extend beyond the classroom. Arts programs are especially beneficial for prison inmates and organizations across the United States fund and organize arts programs specifically for the incarcerated. Susan Sandberg, a career counselor for the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, teaches a weekly class in the arts and humanities at Monroe County Jail. She volunteers with New Leaf/New Life, a grassroots organization dedicated to providing an arts education for the Monroe County Jail inmates. Due to lack of funding, research on the benefits of this specific program do not exist, but Sandberg's six years of volunteering provide enough anecdotal evidence to show that her efforts make a positive impact on the inmates' lives.

Studies in music education, psychology, and criminal justice explore how arts participation can be both therapeutic and positive experiences for prisoners. Participation in group arts activities such as theatre productions, or music ensembles is non-hierarchical and interactive, allowing inmates to develop friendships and collaborate. Martha Nussbaum, a Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, writes that the arts provide people with "the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person." If this is true, it may account for the drop in violence in many prisons once arts programs are established. Some music ensembles, such as the East Hill Singers of the Lansing Correctional Facility, give inmates the opportunity to perform in venues outside of the prison. In June 2008, an East Hill Singer wrote that being a part of the ensemble is "...a commitment to letting music allow an escape from our mental and physical prisons" and that it "will always represent freedom for all of us." Anecdotal and scholarly evidence suggests that arts education positively impacts the lives of prisoners, but in order for these programs to continue, the public and government must recognize its impact offer support.

Introduction

The United States is home to less than five percent of the world's population but houses a over a quarter of the world's prisoners.¹ Almost 1.5 million Americans live in state and federal prisons alone, and even more are housed in local and county jails. In February 2008, for the first time in history, over 1% of the United States population lived in jail or prison.² Unfortunately, the American correctional system is not often successful in helping former prisoners succeed once they are released. About 70% of prisoners who are released are arrested and imprisoned for another offense within three years.³

It is clear that something is missing from what is regularly offered as therapy and education in U.S. prisons. While many prisons offer educational programs to help inmates obtain a GED or community college credit, many independent organizations believe that arts education is what is missing from prison life. Many of these organizations struggle due to lack of funding and because they are limited in what they can bring into the prison due to safety regulations. If these programs can, in fact, dramatically lower the rate of recidivism in prisoners who participate,

¹ Mels, Nancy. "Arts in Prison: Our Programs." *Arts in Prison, Inc. - A Comprehensive Arts in Corrections Program*. Arts in Prison, Inc. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.artsinprison.org/programs.html>>.

² "A First: 1 in 100 Americans Jailed - U.S. News - Crime & Courts - Msnbc.com." *Breaking News, Weather, Business, Health, Entertainment, Sports, Politics, Travel, Science, Technology, Local, US & World News - Msnbc.com*. Associated Press, 28 Feb. 2008. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23392251/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/>.

³ "New Leaf - New Life." [Http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html](http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html). New Leaf - New Life, 2008. Web. 16 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html>>.

government funding and local support of such programs would ultimately save taxpayers' and government money. Furthermore, these programs create a safer environment in correctional facilities. Larry Brewster of San Jose State University conducted a study in 1983 that found that inmates who participated in the California Arts In Corrections program were subjects of fewer disciplinary reports. The study also found that the programs reduced prison violence by as much as 81%, saving nearly double the cost of the program in security and medical costs. Most importantly, the program reduced the prisoners' recidivism rate by 51%.⁴ Arts programs help the inmates in many ways, teaching them to work as a group, develop trust, connect with others, and express their feelings.

This essay will explore the benefits of arts education and how specific arts programs have benefited inmates across the country. Beginning with a study of the power of music education for students, the essay will then describe a premiere prison chorus from Lansing, Kansas. The focus will then shift to theatre arts, studying an organization that mounts Shakespeare plays in Lagrange, Kentucky. Next, it will explore a new program at a juvenile center in Warrenville, Illinois, that incorporates both music and theatre education. Fourth, it will discuss a unique program in Michigan largely run by University of Michigan students and funded by the school that offers many different arts workshops. Finally, the paper will explore a local program in Bloomington, Indiana and how one volunteer's six years of teaching a weekly arts and humanities class at the Monroe County Correctional Facility has enriched the lives of her students. Through these case studies,

⁴ "The Actors' Gang." :: *The Actors' Gang* :: The Actors' Gang, 2008. Web. 07 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.theactorsgang.com/prison.htm>>.

anecdotal evidence from prison inmates and volunteers, and statistical data regarding the recidivism of prisoners who have had the opportunity to participate in these organizations, the essay will show how education in the arts is a necessary addition to prison education programs and argue that such programs deserve government funding and local support.

The Benefits of Music Education

Many studies prove that arts education has a positive impact on schoolchildren, and many of the proven impacts relate to prisoners as well. The Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse stated that secondary students participating in band or orchestra programs had the lowest lifetime and current use of alcohol, tobacco, and other illicit drugs.⁵ Illicit drug use is highly correlated with crime. In a 1997 study by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Americans who had used drugs in the previous year were sixteen times more likely to be arrested for larceny or theft, more than fourteen times more likely to be arrested and booked for driving under the influence, public intoxication, or other liquor law violations, and nine times more likely to be arrested for assault.⁶ The National Institute of Justice Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program collected data in 1998 from thirty-five cities to measure the percentage of arrestees who

⁵ "Why Music Education? 2007." *Http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007*. National Association for Music Education. Web. 4 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007>>.

⁶ "Drug-Related Crime - Factsheet - Drug Facts." *Office of National Drug Control Policy*. Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse, 25 July 2006. Web. 11 Mar. 2011.<<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/factsht/crime/index.html>>.

tested positive for drug abuse upon arrest. The percentage of men arrested testing positive for drugs was as high as 78.7% in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the percentage of females testing positive ranged from 33.3% to 82.1%. If participation in band and orchestra lowers the lifetime use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, prisoners who participate in similar programs may be less likely to abuse substances once they are released.

Music education also helps to increase school attendance and, consequently, keep students out of jail. The National Governors' Association states that the arts provide effective learning opportunities that increase academic performance and reduce absenteeism and adults who have not completed high school or any sort of postsecondary education are more likely to be incarcerated than adults with a higher level of education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).⁷ The National Governors' Association also emphasizes the "striking success of arts-based educational programs among...at-risk and incarcerated youth" (Rabkin, Redmond, 2008).⁸

Music may be especially helpful for prison inmates because learning music helps individuals develop sympathy. Through the exploration of lyrics and different musical styles, those who participate in musical ensembles are able to learn about the lives of others and explore the situations and circumstances of others. Martha

⁷ Majesky-Pullmann, Olivia. "Just the Stats: Prison Inmates More Literate Than Before." *Higher Education News and Jobs*. Diverse Issues In Higher Education, 18 May 2007. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://diverseeducation.com/article/7354/>>.

⁸ Why Music Education? 2007." *Http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007*. National Association for Music Education. Web. 4 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007>>.

Nussbaum, a Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, says participating in the arts gives one the “ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person.”⁹ Arts programs also allow people to work together in a non-hierarchical environment, something that benefits prisoners because they feel that they can contribute equally to something.

Performing in a choral group specifically has been proven to inspire people to become more engaged citizens. Robert Putnam, a Harvard University Government Scholar says that performing as a group contributes to “the social trust and reciprocity that is the basis of civic engagement.”¹⁰ In a 2003 impact study, Chorus America found that 76% of choral singers are involved in charity work as volunteers and donors than the average population (44%).¹¹ They are more than twice as likely to be aware of current events and to be involved in the political process. If there is, in fact, a connection between choral involvement and an increased involvement in society, prisoners participating in such programs are more likely to find success outside of prison as contributing members of society.

Some argue that funding for arts programs for prisoners can be better spent on programs that provide specific vocational training so that inmates are more likely to be employed upon release. While the inmates may not pursue careers in

⁹ Nussbaum, Martha. "Carolina Performing Arts :: Carolina Performing Arts :: News." *Carolina Performing Arts :: Welcome to Carolina Performing Arts*. Web. 11 Mar. 2011.

¹⁰ "Why Music Education? 2007." *Http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007*. National Association for Music Education. Web. 4 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.menc.org/resources/view/why-music-education-2007>>.

¹¹ "Chorus America - Chorus Impact Study 2009." *Chorus America - The Non-Profit Service Organization for Choral Music*. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <http://www.chorusamerica.org/about_choralsinging.cfm>.

music, these studies show that participation in musical ensembles teaches transferrable skills that help prisoners in any job after they are released including creative thinking, problem solving, and communication. Music education also benefits prisoners by teaching them to resist drug use and abuse, to prioritize education, develop sympathy for others, and contribute positively to the community.

The East Hill Singers

One of the most successful and well-known prison choirs is the East Hill Singers. Founded in 1996 and located at the Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kansas, the internationally known choir is made up of about 50 inmate singers from the East Unit of the Correctional Facility, the minimum-security unit of the state prison.¹² Most have never sung before, but they all learn vocal technique and a variety of choral literature during their rehearsals that begin months before each scheduled performance. The choir typically performs four public concerts per year throughout the state of Kansas. Previous concerts have been performed in cities such as Atchison, Topeka, Wichita, and Lawrence. Inmates introduce the songs with narration and the choir is known for its entertaining concert programs and for its full sound. The music performed includes classical music, show tunes, spirituals, and folk music.

¹² Mels, Nancy. "Arts in Prison: Our Programs." *Arts in Prison, Inc. - A Comprehensive Arts in Corrections Program*. Arts in Prison, Inc. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.artsinprison.org/programs.html>>.

About 50% of the choir is made up of volunteer singers. These singers from the community meet once per month to rehearse with the inmates. Their participation greatly enhances the inmates' experience. They volunteers help improve the sound of the choir but also serve as mentors, role models, and friends. Many inmates comment on how they are thankful that people from the community are willing to volunteer to sing with them and about how nice it is to be treated as equals from people in their community.

The inmates gain important skills beyond vocal and musical training through their East Hill Singers experience. They learn to collaborate, work together, and to accept responsibility for their actions in the group. They learn to honor their commitment to the group as they work together to achieve their goal of giving a successful performance, and to respect other members' abilities and efforts. The experience helps the inmates gain self-confidence as they earn the appreciation of the audience after they have performed, giving them a sense of pride and self-worth that they would not be able to gain in any other program offered by the prison.

The best evidence that the experience is beneficial to the Lansing Correctional Facility is through feedback from the inmates. An inmate quoted on the East Hill Singers website said that his participation in the choir gave him, "hope that [he] can do something good when [he] get[s] out. Hope that [he] can be accepted back into society."¹³ Another inmate said that the choir gave him "Caring. I know that the volunteer singers give of their time to come and sing with us, and

¹³ Mels, Nancy. "Arts in Prison: Our Programs." *Arts in Prison, Inc. - A Comprehensive Arts in Corrections Program*. Arts in Prison, Inc. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.artsinprison.org/programs.html>>.

they do it without expecting anything in return. Someday I want to give back.” Former inmates are also living proof of the choir’s effectiveness to change lives. One contributes by donating artwork that is transferred to postcards and sold as a fundraiser for the ensemble. Two men who used to sing in the choir as inmates now sing as volunteers. Lastly, because of their ability to perform outside of the prison, the choir is able to challenge the volunteers and those in their audiences to rethink the stereotypes they may have formed about prison inmates, creating an environment that makes it easier for the inmates to succeed once they have been released.

Shakespeare Behind Bars

Theatre education programs in prisons have also proven to be extremely successful and therapeutic for inmates. Perhaps the most successful theatre education program is Shakespeare Behind Bars, founded in Lagrange, Kentucky. The program, now expanding to include other prisons in Kentucky and Michigan, debuted at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex, a medium-security prison for adult males.¹⁴ Shakespeare Behind Bars is the oldest Shakespeare education program for prisoners in North America, currently in its 16th year of operation. It is so effective and well known that Philomath Films made it the subject of a documentary. The documentary, *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, premiered in 2005 at the Sundance Film Festival and has since won many awards.

¹⁴ Stone, Holly. *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Shakespeare Behind Bars. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org/>>.

The organization produces Shakespeare plays using incarcerated youth and adults as actors, encouraging them to work through their own personal and social issues by relating to their character's story and themes in the play. The process of creating and performing a Shakespeare play with the organization takes nine months to complete. During this time, participants are immersed in rehearsals designed to help transform the inmates from the person they were when they committed the crime to the person they are at present to the person they wish to become. Participants are able to relate the themes in Shakespeare's works to themselves, helping them to make sense of their past experiences and choices, their present situation, and the possibility of their future. By the end of the rehearsal and performing period, the inmates are able to communicate how the universal themes in the play relate to others' lives and to society.

One of the many goals of this 501(c)3 organization is to help the prisoners develop life skills that will ensure their success when they are released. By participating in the program, inmates are given the opportunity to develop a new, lifelong passion for learning. This can be life changing for inmates who are otherwise unlikely to complete or continue their education once they have been released from prison. The program requires inmates to read and memorize their lines, so the participants develop reading, writing, and oral communication skills. This is true even for participants who may struggle with learning disabilities and developmental challenges. Through their work with other participants, the inmates practice and develop decision-making, problem solving, and creative thinking skills.

They also develop empathy, compassion, and trust with the other participating inmates and the Shakespeare Behind Bars Staff.

Many of the desired benefits of the program come from working in a group. The desired benefits listed on the Shakespeare Behind Bars website include a desire to help others and becoming a responsible member of a group, community, and family. The inmates also learn tolerance and practice peaceful conflict resolution in a safe, educational setting. The program is structured to increase self-esteem in the inmates and to help them build a positive self-image by giving them responsibility and offering praise for their hard work and memorization. With increased self-confidence and awareness of others, a goal of Shakespeare Behind Bars is to help inmates ultimately learn to take responsibility for their crime and for their actions on a day-to-day basis.

Curt Tofteland, the Founder and Producer of Shakespeare Behind Bars, founded the organization based on the belief that all humans are inherently good. Tofteland believes that, although convicted criminals have committed crimes against others, their inherent goodness still exists and that his program will change the world for the better by influencing individuals to realize their passion for goodness in themselves and in others.

Shakespeare Behind Bars is extremely effective. The average recidivism rate in Kentucky is 29.5%, but the recidivism rate of participants in Shakespeare Behind Bars at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex is 6%.¹⁵ The program has also

¹⁵Stone, Holly. *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Shakespeare Behind Bars. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org/>>.

increased in popularity and participation. In its first production, the cast consisted of only seven inmates. Today, there are between twenty and thirty members working on a production at any given time, participating as both actors and helping with technical support. Since its inception in 1995, approximately two hundred inmates have participated in the program. Currently, of the twenty-six active inmates, eighteen have completed at least one production and eight are new to the program.

The program also has a successful alumni base. Currently, only 4 of 53 Shakespeare Behind Bars members who had finished their sentence or were released on parole have re-offended and are currently incarcerated. This gives the Shakespeare Behind Bars a current recidivism rate of 7.5%, much lower than the national recidivism rate (67% in a 1994 study), Kentucky's recidivism rate (29.5% based on a 1999-200 study).¹⁶

The educational achievements of Shakespeare Behind Bars members are even more impressive. All of the members have earned at least a GED, and the majority of members have earned at least one technical degree such as an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree from Jefferson Community College, a local community college that offers classes to the prisoners. Many participants have earned a combination of degrees.

Due to its popularity and success at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, the program has expanded to the Northpoint Training Center in Burgen, Kentucky,

¹⁶ Stone, Holly. *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Shakespeare Behind Bars. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org/about/mission.htm>>

the Audubon Youth Development Center in Louisville, Kentucky, and is currently expanding to Michigan. The Michigan Department of Corrections has given Shakespeare Behind Bars permission to begin a new program for twenty-five founding members at the Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility in Muskegon Heights, Michigan. The program is currently fundraising for this new program, which is to begin in Spring 2011.

Arts Programs for Juvenile Centers

Arts education programs are also effective for youth spending time in juvenile correctional facilities. In January 2008, Riccardo Muti, music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, decided to begin a program to expand the orchestra's community outreach to prisons. The Vice President of Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Institute for Learning, Access and Training, Charles Grode, suggested that the symphony partner with Music Theatre Workshop, a nonprofit organization that produces theatre performances by inner-city and incarcerated youth. Now called Storycatchers Theatre, Grode wanted to work with the organization because of its reputation for making a difference in children's lives, a reputation he knew was fact due to an internship with the organization earlier in his career.

Storycatchers Theatre also provided a structure for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to participate in the workshop experience. To facilitate part of the program, Chicago Symphony Orchestra hired two singers to help as vocal coaches. In January 2010, the singers, chorus members Sarah Ponder and Elizabeth Gray, began driving to the Illinois Youth Center in Warrenville once or twice each week to

work with twenty incarcerated girls who wanted to participate in the program. The orchestra also sent musicians to work with the incarcerated girls. The workshop culminated in five performances of “Man in the Moon,” a musical production both written and performed by the Warrenville residents. The story was based on their life stories.

Elizabeth Gray had such a positive experience as a vocal coach for the prisoners that she said, “it’s the type of work [she] could see [her]self doing without getting paid. There’s something about going into that environment and changing their day...and making them feel that they can go beyond what brought them [to the correctional facility].”¹⁷ Sarah Ponder reflected that the women have spent much of their lives thinking about what they’ve done wrong and that by working on something else, they are able to see positive images and new possibilities for the rest of their lives. The program allowed the residents to get to know each other better and to appreciate what they have in common. It built their confidence and employees of the prison said that it helped create a more peaceful environment.

While all of the girls at the Youth Center in Warrenville committed serious and violent crimes, all of them were also victims of abuse, according to a report from Warrenville’s Superintendent, Judy Davis. Davis says that the program is cathartic and is a viable “treatment option for them. It’s a great way for them to work out their issues and traumas without thinking they’re in treatment.”

¹⁷ Gregory, Ted. "Life-changing Work: CSO Partners with Juvenile Correctional Center for Performance *Featured Articles From The Chicago Tribune*. 18 Oct. 2010. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-18/news/ct-met-1019-storycatchers-20101018_1_storycatchers-theatre-cso-musicians-cso-director/3>.

Storycatchers founder and artistic director Meade Palidofsky and Bradley Stolbach, an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics at La Rabida Children's Hospital, compiled anecdotal research suggesting that theatrical programs like this are therapeutic, allowing incarcerated adolescents to write and stage their personal stories. One resident performer spoke about why she liked the experience saying, "it's not even like they're teaching us. They're sharing with us. It's like they really believe in us too."¹⁸

The Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP)

An effective way of recruiting volunteers and educating future arts therapists is to teach university-level classes that train students to teach arts workshops for prisoners. The Prison Creative Arts Project, or PCAP, was founded in 1990 by Buzz Alexander, an English professor at the University of Michigan.¹⁹ The organization's mission is to strengthen the community through creative expression by collaborating with incarcerated adults and youth, the formerly incarcerated, and urban youth. The program is supported by the School of Art and Design at the University of Michigan, and most members join after taking a course from Buzz

¹⁸ Gregory, Ted. "Life-changing Work: CSO Partners with Juvenile Correctional Center for Performance - Page 3 - Chicago Tribune." *Featured Articles From The Chicago Tribune*. 18 Oct. 2010. Web. 11 Mar. 2011. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-18/news/ct-met-1019-storycatchers-20101018_1_storycatchers-theatre-cso-musicians-cso-director/3>.

¹⁹ "Prison Creative Arts Project." *Prison Creative Arts Project*. University of Michigan, 2002. Web. 12 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap/>>.

Alexander that trains students to facilitate arts workshops in state prisons and juvenile facilities.

Professor Alexander's students learn how to lead workshops in visual art, creative writing, and theatre. Facilitators are trained to maintain open communication with the staff of the prisons and to understand and respect all institution rules and regulations. The students form teams, and the teams that are still in training meet every week to discuss their progress and seek advice. Experienced teams meet every other week.

Working in groups of two to three people, the facilitators lead workshops on original plays, art, writing, dance, and music. As of September 2006, the Prison Creative Arts Project facilitated the production and performance of over two hundred original plays in twenty-two prisons and one hundred thirty-three plays in five juvenile facilities.²⁰ PCAP volunteers also facilitated sixty-nine creative writing workshops in fifteen prisons and thirty-one creative writing workshops in five juvenile facilities that led to public readings. They also led thirteen art workshops in nine prisons and four in juvenile facilities. Multiple music and dance workshops have been offered as well.

In the visual art workshops, the facilitators strive to create an environment in which participants are able to learn technical skills and create meaningful works of art. Lessons include topics such as portraiture, shading, and color. Facilitators bring materials such as books and handouts to help the inmates learn artistic

²⁰ "Prison Creative Arts Project." *Prison Creative Arts Project*. University of Michigan, 2002. Web. 12 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap/>>.

concepts such as perspective and color-mixing. Each participant is encouraged to work on individual projects, and inmates who have ideas for projects outside of topics covered in class are given personal attention in order to learn how to successfully complete their project. The workshops provide time for private introspection about their work and time to appreciate and critique the work of others. Many of the artists participate in PCAP's Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners that is held at the University of Michigan. Artists in juvenile facilities participate in their own annual exhibition that is filled with their own original artwork. In March 2006, 247 artists from 44 prisons submitted 372 works of art to the Annual Prison Art Exhibition. The exhibition provides an opportunity for the incarcerated community to connect with the greater Michigan community and displays the prisoners' talents and perspectives. Autobiographical statements are included with each work of art. While they are not able to attend in person, the artists are able to view a videotape of the opening reception so that they can hear the opening speeches and see the crowd at the event. They are also given fliers and reviews of the event and are able to read all of the comments in the visitors' book.

The facilitators of the creative writing workshops encourage everyone to work together to create authentic, original writing. They help the inmates develop writing skills and provide an environment that welcomes supportive responses to others' work. At the end of each workshop, the facilitators give the inmates an assignment that they mutually agree to complete, and the homework is then used as the basis of reading and discussion at the next session. At the end of the workshop, the Prisoners Creative Arts Project organizes a reading. Outside guests and other

program members attend the reading and youth writers are sometimes able to read their work at the University of Michigan. Participants in the creative writing workshops learn to work together, listen carefully to one another, and offer constructive feedback to their peers. By the end of the workshop, all are able to write their own stories using both their own history and their imagination. Perhaps most importantly, they learn to take responsibility for their own work and learn to speak before an audience. They then receive attention and praise from the audience, gaining self-confidence as they develop the ability to write and share.

In the theatre workshops, the group works together to create a play. The facilitators focus on discovery and use specific warm-ups, games, improvisations, exercises, and discussion to create the play. They develop the concept of each play as they go using improvisation exercises. After the participants conceptualize the full play, they learn their original dialogue and blocking. They work together, practicing public speaking skills as they perform before an audience of their peers and of outside guests. The attention and praise from the audience increases each participant's sense of self-worth and their success allows them to imagine their potential for new possibilities in life. Although each play is an original product of improvisation and collaboration, nearly every play centers on the effort to form communities, begin families, and the will to have a successful life once they are released. Due to the many negative experiences that the inmates have shared, the plays also reflect the difficult lives and harsh realities that the prisoners have faced and their search for solutions. No matter the final subject of the play, facilitators report that participants end the workshop with a feeling of community and family.

PCAP's values statement says that art should be accessible to everyone and that "art it is necessary for individual and societal growth, connection, and survival" (PCAP website). Through the arts, inmates can collaborate and learn vulnerability, risk, and improvisation that leads to resilience, patience, and persistence.

Many prisoners and families of prisoners have written testimonials about how PCAP's workshops have positively impacted their lives. Of an upcoming performance of exhibition, a family member of an inmate wrote: "On March 22, 2005 my father will no longer be a number, but instead you have made him an artist." An artist reflected that the experience "made many of us feel human once again. Thank you so much for that." Another participant said that that his involvement with Prison Creative Arts Project "raise[ed] confidence, dignity, pride, and a sense of self worth" that he did not possess before beginning the program. Other participants wrote that the program has "help[ed] us to maintain our identity."

Another participant wrote that the project, "made [him] feel like a real person after almost 9 ½ years of being merely a number and an unwelcomed burden on society. The consideration and respect you offered was every bit as encouraging as accepting [his] work for exhibit." The mother of an artist wrote that, while her son had always had artistic talent, he did not have the confidence to pursue it before participating in a PCAP workshop. Now, she and her son "see a future for him."²¹

²¹ "Prison Creative Arts Project." *Prison Creative Arts Project*. University of Michigan, 2002. Web. 12 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap/>>.

It is clear that these workshops, exhibitions, and readings provide an invaluable experience for the inmates who participate. They learn how to collaborate, are given the opportunity and encouragement express themselves, and they are respected by the facilitators of the workshops.

New Leaf - New Life and the Monroe County Correctional Center

In order to better understand New Leaf – New Life, an organization to help prisoners in Bloomington, Indiana, and the personal experiences of Susan Sandberg, a New Leaf – New Life volunteer, it is important to understand the background of the Monroe County Correctional Center and its inmates. The Monroe County Correctional Center moved to its current location on South Walnut Street in Bloomington, Indiana in March of 1986.²² It was designed to hold 124 inmates and employ 54 full-time staff members. Due to an increase in inmate population, beds were added in many of the cells so that two inmates could sleep in the same cell. In 2009, the county was forced to expand the facility to include more double bunking in cells. An area on the first floor of the jail was also expanded to create a new housing area. The bed total as of the 2009 Office of Monroe County Sheriff Report was 278. In 2009, the average inmate population was 257.

James Kennedy, the Sheriff of Monroe County stated in his February 2010 letter that crime has risen steadily in Monroe County. The 2009 crime rate was 6% higher than the 2008 crime rate. Between 1999 and 2009, crime increased by 29%.

²² “2009 Annual Report: The Office of Monroe County Sheriff, James L. Kennedy

This may be due in part because, while there has been a 7% increase in population between 1999 and 2009, the amount of police and other correctional officers in the Monroe County workforce has not changed. The most common crimes committed in Monroe County are aggravated assault, burglaries, larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts. All other crimes rarely committed.

Monroe County does offer educational opportunities for their inmates and in 2009, nearly 14,000 books were circulated to over 3,000 inmates through an agreement with Monroe County Library. Through the Monroe County Correctional Center's adult education program, twenty inmates passed the General Education Exam (GED) and one hundred thirty-five inmates participated in classes. Three took Ivy Tech Community College entrance exams. The 2009 Annual Report for the Office of the Monroe County Sheriff states that the office "will collaborate with community, mental health, educational, and volunteer groups to provide appropriate services for inmates." The staff upholds this statement by helping to supervise the many citizen volunteers, like those from New Leaf – New Life, whose work is not supported by tax dollars.

New Leaf – New Life Incorporated was founded in April 2005 by Rev. Harold Taylor, Tania Karnofsky, David and Joan White, Wain Martin, Jim Hart, Lib Buck, and Vid Beldavs. The founders were members of Citizens for Effective Justice, a criminal justice reform advocacy organization also located in Bloomington, Indiana. Citizens for Effective Justice focuses on changing the criminal justice system, but the founders of New Leaf – New Life felt that another organization was necessary to address the other unmet needs of Bloomington's inmates.

Founder Rev. Harold Taylor was concerned that the correctional facility was not living up to its mission, believing that the corrections system “should be correct. People should come out of prison and jail more capable of leading productive lives than when they entered the system.”²³ New Leaf – New Life argues that the majority of people who enter the criminal justice system become less able to contribute to society as a result of their time in jail. The statistics agree. According to their website, over 95% of those incarcerated eventually return to the community, but 70% of those released will reenter the system for a new crime within three years of their release²⁴. The organization strives to provide care throughout an individual’s experience in the correctional system, beginning when an individual enters Monroe County Correctional Facility and continuing through their incarceration and once they have been released with transitional support services and ongoing programs to help those released to avoid recidivism. New Leaf – New Life also believes in the value of involving the family of the incarcerated individual, reaching out to the family of the inmate to provide support and to help the family overcome potential problems related to their family member’s incarceration.

New Leaf – New Life programming begins with an intake program. This program is designed to help a newly incarcerated individual effectively adjust so

²³ "New Leaf - New Life." *Http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html*. New Leaf - New Life, 2008. Web. 16 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html>>.

²⁴ "New Leaf - New Life." *Http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html*. New Leaf - New Life, 2008. Web. 16 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.newleaf-newlife.org/NewLeaf-NewLife.html>>.

that they are able to take advantage of their experience in the Monroe County Correctional Facility. During the intake process, inmates are assessed, given motivational interviews, and are provided with resources for dealing with anger management. They are also given personalized direction as to how to succeed in jail. Inmates then receive a Reentry Workbook where they can begin indentifying the problems currently face and are likely to face and can explore their capability to address these problems.

The volunteers at New Leaf – New Life seek to take full advantage of the inmate’s time in prison as an opportunity for a short-duration intervention. Incarceration provides the opportunity for an individual to be removed from their current culture, a culture that may encourage criminal behavior and addiction. A typical inmate at the Monroe County Correctional Center remains in jail for about three months, which is enough time to offer a program for the inmate to learn a significant amount of information. New Leaf – New Life considered many different options in their planning to provide intensive addiction services that could be implemented with limited resources. Their solution was to offer a therapeutic community in two cell blocks.

The organization focuses on substance abuse treatment because the lack of treatment is a leading contributing factor to overcrowding in the Monroe County jail. It is estimated that 80% of the inmates suffer from addiction. Unfortunately, conventional programs to help the incarcerated overcome their addictions have had limited success because the time available for intervention has been too short. If intensive treatment is not offered while the person suffering from addiction is still

in jail, addiction treatment is even more difficult once the person is released into the community as they struggle to live among a culture of drug dealing and drinking. Intensive treatment offered during an inmate's sentence might help them be successful once released because they are taught the dangers of returning to an environment conducive to substance abuse. As more offenders go through the Drug Court and comply with treatment, there has been more success in reducing recidivism and overcrowding.

New Leaf – New Life uses volunteers to facilitate programs to help inmates and those who have been recently released become successful and independent members of the community. Due to budget constraints at the state and local government level, volunteers are vital to the organization's success. Current volunteers are proposing programs such as a fishing program to develop self-confidence inmates' children and an organic gardening program. One such volunteer is Susan Sandberg.

Susan Sandberg

For the past six years, Susan Sandberg, a career counselor for the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, teaches a weekly class in the arts and humanities at Monroe County Correctional Facility. The two-hour class meets on Saturdays on the facility's first floor. The inmates on this floor participate in a voluntary "addicts in recovery" program. As volunteers in this program, they have accepted that their addiction is uncontrollable and that controlling their addiction is essential to their future success in society. While the upper floors of the

correctional facility have windows, this bottom unit does not, so these inmates have chosen to forego the benefit of being able to look outside to receive this treatment. Many of the prisoners Ms. Sandberg works with sleep two to a cell, and some have difficulty getting along with each other.

Ms. Sandberg wishes that the teaching conditions were better and often finds it difficult to have a comfortable discussion while sitting in the facility's hard, plastic chairs and gathering around tables that are bolted to the ground. Another distraction comes from the inmate's one restroom, which is located down the hall from the cafeteria room in which they meet. When an inmate leaves to use the restroom, all can hear as the toilet flushes.

Despite the uncomfortable conditions, Ms. Sandberg enjoys working with these prisoners. They are genuinely interested in learning and it is clear that her class offers relief from the monotony of prison life. Many of the prisoners were regularly absent from school as they grew up and she notes that they are surprised when she tells them that they could have been learning about music, theatre, poetry and other arts in school as they explore these art forms in the class.

Ms. Sandberg uses a mix of different artistic mediums in her class. She's taught multiple Shakespeare units and has read and discussed Hamlet, Macbeth, The Tempest, and Othello with the inmates. She uses books with a side-by-side translation so that they can begin by reading the story in modern English and also study the Shakespearian English. When a particularly important monologue or scene is reached, she asks them to read the Shakespearian English after they have already read and understood the part of the story through the modern English

translation. When asked which they prefer, she says that the prisoners almost always say that they prefer the Shakespearian, even though it is difficult to understand. Ms. Sandberg reports that many of them can easily read the passages in iambic pentameter, and enjoy how the language sounds when it is spoken aloud.

Another popular unit that Ms. Sandberg has taught multiple times is a poetry unit. This unit is enhanced by one of her friends who frequently competes in slam poetry competitions. He performs for the group, gives them topics to begin writing poetry, and encourages them to perform at the end of class. During her interview, Ms. Sandberg remarked that many of the prisoners are quite talented. She makes sure to lead applause after every prisoner's performance and describes how incredible it is to see the prisoners' faces light up when their success and creativity is rewarded with applause from their teacher and their peers.

Occasionally, Ms. Sandberg uses film in the class. Once, she focused on *O Brother, Where Art Thou* to show how a basic knowledge of United States History is necessary to understand many of the jokes in the movie. This emphasizes that a general education is helpful in understanding popular culture. It is an effective way to encourage the prisoners to pursue an education because it helps them to realize how an education can help them to better enjoy certain aspects of life.

Ms. Sandberg also uses recorded music. A recent unit was controversial as she brought Eminem's newest CD to facilitate a discussion about his lyrics. Eminem's music is known for being dark and full of obscenities. Ms. Sandberg realizes this, but also sees the value in uses his music do discuss themes such as domestic violence and betrayal with the inmates. These two themes may have been

present in the inmates' lives before they were incarcerated, and she said that the prisoners enjoy connecting the lyrics of the music to events in their own lives. She says that it is an effective way to encourage the group to share stories of their past with the group and learn from their own and from others' mistakes.

While she says that the arts are effective learning tools, she thinks that the program is most effective because of the relationships she builds with the prisoners and the relationships that build among the prisoners during the course of the classes. The guards at the Monroe County Correctional Center do see a change after the inmates participate in the class and report that they have less trouble with this wing than they do with the other wings of the correctional facility. They say that they are more productive with their addicts in recovery workbooks, and that leaders emerge after they have had the opportunity to be a leader in the class. These natural leaders encourage the other prisoners in the unit to complete their required addicts in recovery workbook pages each day.

It is Ms. Sandberg's opinion that loneliness and isolation is a leading cause of addiction, and she knows that this class gives the inmates a sense of belonging in a community of men. Listening to music, reading, and writing give the inmates something to be excited about. Ms. Sandberg never prepares a syllabus, and her plans change at a moment's notice. If she plans on reading more of a play and she senses that the group is not interested, she'll pull out something else from her "bag of tricks" to see if it will produce a better response. The class gives the inmates an opportunity to express themselves and get positive feedback. The inmates may not have had the opportunity to be recognized for their efforts in many years, and they

truly appreciate the applause and encouragement after they share an opinion or perform for the group. The inmates develop a sense of self-worth as they see that someone respects them outside of the prison. They find hope that their life beyond bars can be successful as they recognize that volunteers in the community care enough about them to take time out of their lives to work with them and to teach them.

Unfortunately, Ms. Sandberg reports that it is difficult to see measurable success in the short-term for programs such as hers. A study to see how many of the current inmates participating in the program have become more successful than inmates not participating in the program would take years. Ms. Sandberg's father is a teacher, and through his experiences, she realizes that students may not realize the benefit of their education until as many as twenty years after the class was completed. Years after their involvement, though, she says that her father's former students who have returned to Bloomington recognize him and thank him for what he has taught them. She hopes to hear from former inmates in the years to come who are successful in society and who can express how her class impacted their lives. Even though there are no real statistics from her program or from New Leaf – New Life's efforts, she knows that she is making a positive impact and will continue to work with the prisoners because she knows that she is making a difference.

Conclusion

Even though New Leaf – New Life has not been able to fund a study and has only been in existence for six years, every program has been able to measure

success in some way, be it through testimonials from volunteers who teach the classes, to quotes from inmates who have participated in and enjoyed the arts program, from quotes from parents and family members of those who have participated, or from hard evidence from a quantitative study. Because Shakespeare Behind Bars is so well established, of all of the programs studied, Shakespeare Behind Bars has been able to best prove that participation has dramatically reduced the amount of prisoners that re-enter the correctional system. Perhaps the success of this program is due to the amount of staff dedicated to the program. Curt Tofteland, the founder and producing director, works with an accomplished artistic director, director of technology and communications, and costume designer to direct and produce each workshop and performance. This kind of staff, all four of which have worked in professional theatre, does not exist in other organizations, and the program's success is likely due to their expertise, experience and dedication.

The Prison Creative Arts System is another strong example, supported by the students of Buzz Alexander and the University of Michigan. Mr. Alexander helps train new volunteers to lead arts workshops, so the Prison Creative Arts Project always has plenty of dedicated volunteers, whose interest in the arts as therapy for the incarcerated led them to take a college class on the practice. They are able to offer so many different workshops because of the varying interest and expertise of their growing volunteer base, so this model is especially effective. A similar model would benefit an organization like New Leaf – New Life because it is located in Bloomington, Indiana, home to Indiana University. Indiana University is known for

its public affairs programs, performing arts, and education programs, so the university is full of talented students who would be highly qualified to teach workshops at the Monroe County Correctional Facility. Partnering with local universities who are willing to help fund programs and educate students as volunteers would help expand such programs, and strengthen current programs in college towns that have not yet tapped into the student market for volunteers to facilitate workshops.

In general, more studies of successful arts education organizations should be compiled to further prove the benefits of such organizations in helping reduce recidivism in prison inmates. If additional government funding was allotted to help these organizations purchase supplies and provide small stipends for teachers and facilitators of these classes and workshops, the benefits of the reduced rate of recidivism would ultimately save money in the long run as the programs help to reduce the amount of prisoners living in the nation's prisons. All Americans would benefit if less of the U.S. population were behind bars and more of the population were able to contribute to society.

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