

July 2022

PRISON  
**arts**  
COLLECTIVE

# Prison Arts Collective:

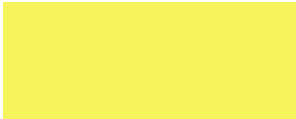
## Adapting to COVID-19





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# Introducing Prison Arts Collective

Prison Arts Collective (PAC) is supported by Arts in Corrections, a project of the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, with additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and CDCR Innovative Programming Grants. PAC is based at San Diego State University with chapters at California State University, Fullerton and California Polytechnic University, Humboldt and research partnerships with California State University, San Bernardino and University of California, Irvine.

PAC provides visual and interdisciplinary arts programming to people experiencing incarceration in California state prisons. The project offers a vibrant and effective approach to rehabilitation through multidisciplinary arts programming that integrates principles of restorative justice through a rich and varied approach to the creative process.

*PAC utilizes collaborative teaching teams that include university faculty and students, staff teaching artists, guest artists, and currently and formerly incarcerated peer leaders.*



# PAC's Mission is based on the belief in art as a human right.

PAC is dedicated to being an inclusive space and practices the belief that every voice matters. PAC envisions a collaborative and inclusive society where everyone has access to the arts to promote wellbeing and empowerment.

**The PAC four-part model includes:**



## **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to address how PAC has adapted to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) while reporting PAC's growth and influence on participants' rehabilitation.

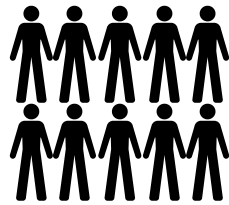


# PAC's Impact

Pelican Bay State Prison



**14**  
California  
Prisons



**5,675**  
Incarcerated  
Participants



**316**  
Courses  
Taught

Valley State Prison



Central California Women's Facility



Pleasant Valley State Prison



Avenal State Prison Central



California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison

California State Prison, Los Angeles County



Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

California Institution for Women



California Institution for Men

California Rehabilitation Center



Ironwood State Prison



Calipatria State Prison

Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility



**945**



**INSTITUTIONALIZED  
PARTICIPANTS PER YEAR**

**42**



**PAC FACULTY MEMBERS**

**335**



**TRAINED INSTITUTIONALIZED  
PARTICIPANT-PEER FACILITATORS**

*Note:* PAC's statistics reflects data collected from 2016 to May 2022.

# Adapting to COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenge to the in-person operations and arts facilitation of Prison Arts Collective (PAC). However, PAC quickly assessed and reconfigured the program to ensure that participants were able to receive content to learn and grow through the arts content supporting the development of self-expression, reflection, communication, and empathy. Distance learning presented a time of reflection for the participants and the program. While the pandemic created serious concerns for the wellbeing of our participants and continues to be a challenge in our work, this experience has pushed PAC to grow and provides an opportunity for PAC and the wider Arts in Corrections community to gain knowledge from distance learning activities and hybrid offerings.

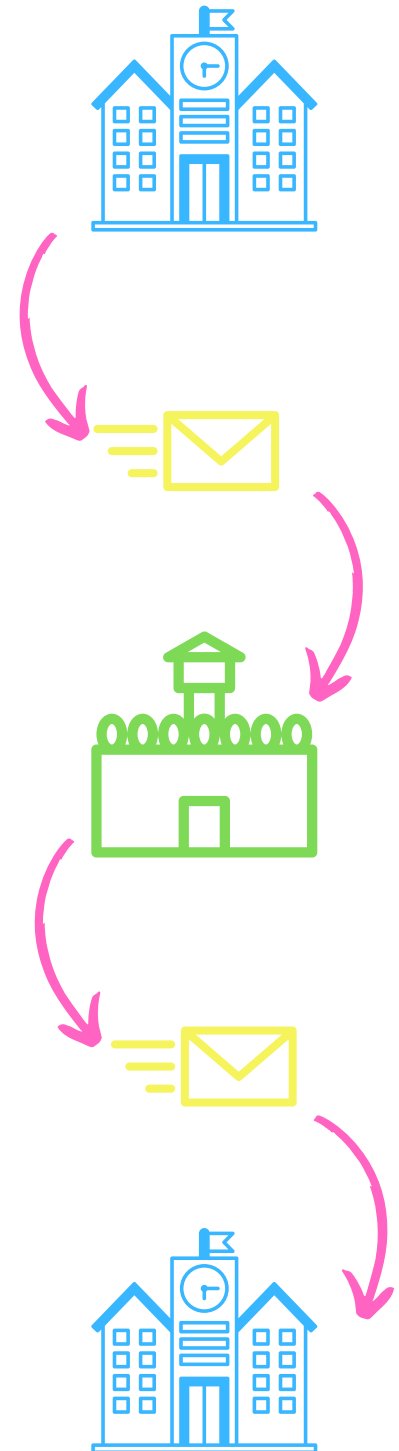


While practicing social distancing and reducing the spread of COVID-19, PAC transitioned the in-person lessons and art programming to engaging and creative distance learning packets. With a learner-centered philosophy, PAC reflected and developed distance learning packets that underwent three stages of development.

# PAC Program Adaptations

## Stage 1

In the initial throes of the pandemic, in Spring 2020, distance learning packets were a new modality of programming for PAC. Most classes were in the midst of a 15-week session and the teaching teams created more detailed lessons for the subsequent classes in each session. Because of restrictions within correctional institutions, the only option available at that time was to mail hard copies of these lessons. The team took careful notes on the details of how each institution could receive the packets, including some requesting them to be mailed directly to participants and others to the institutions. PAC also received approval to send in small packets of art materials with the lessons. It took several months before the team received lessons back from participants in the mail. Upon reviewing the responses, PAC took note of the suggestions and feedback from PAC participants inside the prisons, such as being more clear which parts to keep and which to send back, and adding page numbers to lessons. PAC adjusted the curriculum to accommodate participants who required more instruction. The team also ensured to reduce learning gaps by creating distance learning packets that reflect participants' differing literacy levels.



## Stage 2

In the second stage, in the summer of 2020, the PAC team created new distance learning packets to start a fully distanced session. These packets promoted diverse perspectives on learning. Teaching teams from the four university sites met virtually to discuss the best way to support all learners. PAC decided to integrate more visuals throughout the lessons, to create specific icons to demonstrate what to send back through the mail, and to work together on one special packet instead of each team making their own. As a result, the team created a visually appealing multidisciplinary arts packet with less text, a diverse roster of artists referenced, and clear instructions. In addition, a former PAC participant on the Humboldt team worked with faculty to translate the curriculum he had created as a peer facilitator while incarcerated to be a new distance learning packet. PAC's collaboration with supporting California State Universities allowed the team to add a new multidisciplinary packet.

Rather than include lengthy texts, PAC revised distance learning packets to add more visuals with shorter, more focused texts, making them more accessible for a wider group of learners with the secondary goal of improving participants' focus on critical and creative thought. This format adjustment encourages participants to make associations between pieces of information, soak up chunks of course content quickly, function as a memory aid, and practice creative application of course material.

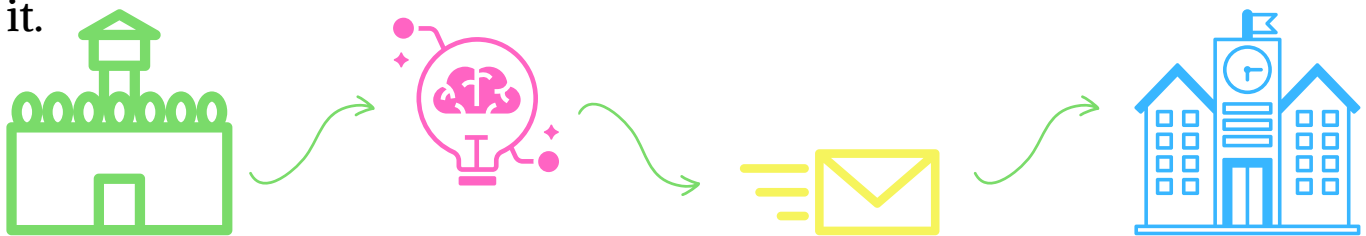


## Stage 3



The third and expansive phase of distance learning includes collaborations and multimedia. To expand on the growth of the distance learning packets, PAC began an exciting collaboration with artists around the world. Throughout 2021, PAC partnered with a talent agency based in the UK, named Huxley. Huxley volunteered with PAC to design a guest artist distance learning packet, consisting of 15 individual lessons over 15 weeks, each created in collaboration with a global artist working in video, painting, music, and other creative mediums. PAC mailed this new program out to participants in our classes across the state. When the institutions gradually brought back in-person programming, PAC teachers led this Huxley program at California Institution for Men (CIM) and is currently bringing it to the 12 men's and women's California State Prisons where PAC holds programming. In addition, PAC began two programs that would expand access to the arts to more people in the prisons, and not only to those in the programs. Starting in 2020, PAC created Outside:Inside Productions, which included arts and yoga instructional videos that were submitted to California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to show on CDCR television in the institutions.

In addition, PAC partners with radio station-KSPC and volunteer hosts at UC Irvine to create a podcast and radio show featuring artists, writers, and musicians who are formerly incarcerated. The programming is focused on content that can benefit listeners both inside and outside of the prison. One of PAC's teachers who participated in PAC programming while incarcerated noted that many people have access to radios and PAC began this program with the goal of expanding it to radio stations throughout California so that more people incarcerated in CDCR can listen to it.



This was a learning experience for not only the students but for PAC. With three stages of developmental revisions, PAC has sent over 2,000 distance learning packets to 14 California State Prisons since June 2020. The distance learning packets reflect 15 unique curriculum plans, from multidisciplinary arts to guest artists to creative writing and yoga, for individuals experiencing incarceration.

Practicing the teachings of growth and reflection, PAC demonstrates an opportunity for distant learning and hybrid offerings in times of institutional closures. Through this format, participants' learning will not be deterred in instances that prevent in-person programs. Participants' accessibility and improved stylings of PAC's distance learning packets allow students the convenience of art education, application, and rehabilitation through the course material. Whether it is in-person, distance learning, or hybrid, Prison Arts Collective seeks to transform the lives of incarcerated individuals through the arts.

# Participant Voices

While facilitating art learning through distance learning packets, PAC participants voiced their experiences and continued interests in art. Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on PAC programming from March 2020 to December 2021, PAC collected voluntary survey responses.

With over 200 surveys collected, participants shared similar sentiments about their learning and personal experiences. An overwhelming number of participants disclosed that the last time they had created an art piece was in grade school. Participants voiced that they are appreciative of having this opportunity to create and learn with PAC. Other participants described how they have been incarcerated for so long, that they did not remember any art they may have created in the past.

Joining PAC, many participants shared their skepticism about their artistic abilities. However, as their time in PAC continued, they shared that they have creatively grown. Collectively, many participants noted their interest in exploring various styles of art including portraits, caricatures, graphics, modern, and acrylic art. Many participants have shared their appreciation for PAC and want to continue their work in the arts.

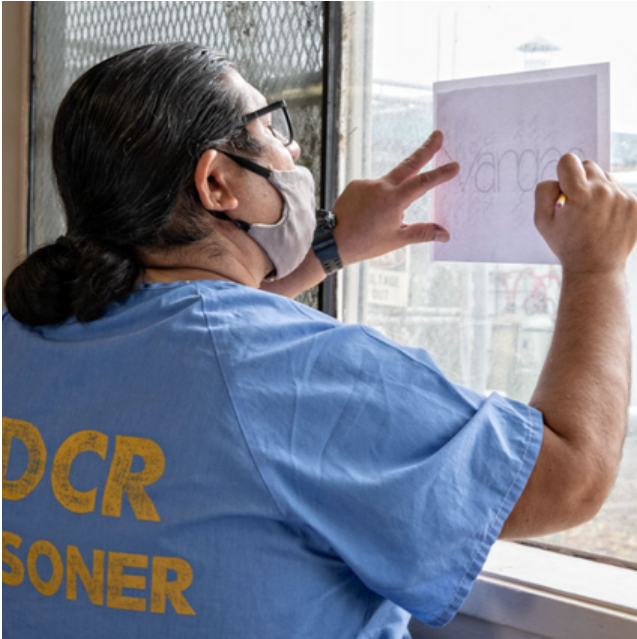


*"I have been very fortunate enough to be part of this program for a few years now. I've made a lot of friends and met a lot of nice, and interesting artists. Because of this program, I can call myself an artist."*

- California Institution for Men Participant (2021)



# Participant Voices



*"I'd like to say "thank you", and to all others involved as well. For your time & patience. This class is a nice change for me and others in our daily routine."*

– Calipatria State Prison Participant (2021)

*"I wish to thank you for including me in your class/program. It is a necessary class, for it gives us inmates something to do and something to learn, and while you keep us busy doing something positive, it also keeps us away from the negative things!"*

– Calipatria State Prison Participant (2020)



*"Thank you for having this (PAC) class. I love that there are people who care about me. I appreciate your hard work. It helps me be better, thank you."*

– Calipatria State Prison Participant (2020)

# Evaluation & Investigation

*PAC has a history and record of empirical analysis of its programming starting in 2013. Currently, PAC's Research Team, consisting of researchers from California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), San Diego State University (SDSU), and University of California, Irvine (UCI), are overseeing an expanded research study approved by the State IRB in 2019. This study examines the impact of the arts programming on individual and communal wellness for people experiencing incarceration. Data collection is taking place at 12 CDCR facilities and data analysis will take place across SDSU, CSUSB, and UCI. Prison Art Collective's (PAC) goal is to expand availability of the arts to individuals who are incarcerated.*

In the US, in-prison programming has been developed to aid in the rehabilitative process of individuals sentenced to incarceration. Prison programming takes many forms, including but not limited to: academic, vocational, religious, cognitive-based interventions, and arts (Cullen & Gilbert, 2012). There have been many studies on prison programs to determine the efficacy of these efforts to reduce recidivism (Cullen 2013; Cullen and Gendreau 2001; Cullen and Gilbert 2012; and Gendreau and Ross 1987). Larry Brewster (2014), renowned Arts in Corrections researcher, created a model for studying in-prison programs (specifically in the arts) to demonstrate the transformative effects of the arts far beyond incarceration.

Through a series of qualitative and quantitative articles, Brewster (2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) demonstrates that access and engagement with the arts impact incarcerated individuals' attitudes, behaviors, social and life skills, and overall feelings of self-worth. Prison Arts Collective (PAC) celebrates this holistic view of healing and transformation through engagement with arts and poses a related question: What is the impact of arts during incarceration on well-being?



# Measuring Wellbeing During CV-19

*Covid-19, as a global health crisis, had alarming impacts on the mental well-being of incarcerated people in addition to physical health concerns. Restricted movement, high numbers of covid-positive cases, lack of access to in-person programs and volunteers, and frequent transfers had severe implications for the mental well-being of prisoners.*



Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), incarcerated PAC participants are given pre-and-post surveys to understand better the impact of programming on their mental well-being. WEMWBS is a validated survey instrument developed in 2006 by a panel of experts. The developers noticed that the focus of mental health tended to be on individuals experiencing poor mental health. Beyond those experiences, minimal emphasis was focused on those at the other end of the spectrum, experiencing fair to good mental health. WEMWBS takes a public health approach to well-being by adding a dimension of mental well-being to traditional forms such as physical health, environment, food, and others. WEMWBS's theory is that the aspects we pay attention to matter. Therefore, the survey is intentionally focused on positive aspects of well-being and worded positively as opposed to a more traditional focus on mental illness and poor mental health. WEMWBS has a two-week scale of reference, utilizing a five-point Likert scale across 14 dimensions of psychological and subjective well-being.

*Note: Survey instruments available by request. In addition to the WEMWBS tool, PAC employs 2 additional survey instruments and a series of pre-and-post open-ended qualitative questions for active PAC research participants.*

# Future Directions



PAC is proud and honored to continue providing transformative arts programming at 14 California Institutions. While the current pandemic remains unpredictable, PAC has adapted to ensure program fidelity and continuity despite changing CV-19 protocols. When institutions become inaccessible due to CV-19, staff shortages, or safety concerns, PAC is now poised to continue program delivery through high-impact correspondence programming.

In addition to our transformative arts and facilitator training for incarcerated participants, our research into participant wellness will continue in the coming years as part of PAC's efforts to assess its activities. Beyond the wellness questionnaire, PAC plans to continue to employ community-based research to deepen our responsiveness to participant needs.



We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all of PAC's funders, supporters, volunteers, and participants!

To get in contact with us, please email, Program Founder & Director, Prof. Annie Buckley at [ambuckley@sdsu.edu](mailto:ambuckley@sdsu.edu).