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Obstacles to Justice: Examining the Relationships Between Arts Organizations and Probation Offices in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties

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ABSTRACT

As criminal justice reform has gained momentum in the United States, it is worth evaluating the relationships between correctional institutions, parole and probation offices, and the arts organizations that operate within them. This study examines these relationships in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in Southern California. Best practices and methods are explored, as well as the ways in which the institutions that constitute the justice system can better support arts organizations in their efforts to work with justice-involved young people.

KEYWORDS

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INTRODUCTION

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world (Widra and Herring, 2021). In response to these tragic and complicated circumstances, there has been a myriad of efforts to reform the justice system around the United States and at all levels of government (Cosgrove, 2020; Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2021; Oceguera, 2021; Tamburin, 2021). Most of these proposals have been aimed at efforts to end cash bail, limit the use of force by police (Oceguera, 2021), ease parole requirements, and divert more people to recovery courts (Tamburin, 2021). Perhaps this trend is best encapsulated in Los Angeles County, where the largest youth justice system in the U.S. is transitioning from supervision by the Probation Office to a new Department of Youth Development that will emphasize a "care-first" model, rather than punishment, for the children in its care (Cosgrove, 2020).

This movement for reform follows three decades of increased criminal punishment and overcrowded prisons across the U.S. (Porter *et al.*, 2016; Shannon *et al.*, 2017). This period of mass incarceration began to peak in the 1990s; at the same time, there was an explosion in the number of nonprofit programs working with justice-impacted individuals (Mijs, 2016). Many of these programs have utilized the arts to encourage and sustain positive change for system-impacted people (Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016; Hickey, 2015). Hickey (2015) notes that "music educators are positioned to make a positive impact for detained youth, now more than ever, as the philosophy of these settings is evolving from a punitive approach toward a more rehabilitative one" (p. 2). While there may be a strong desire from the public at large from non-profit programs for this transition, it is reasonable to expect that many correctional institutions and probation offices would resist these changes. When changes toward more lenient approaches clash with institutional mind-sets, traditions and practices, the results are often inconsistent, and may even lead to tension and conflict.

There is a significant body of research suggesting that arts programs benefit justice-involved youth by allowing participants to change the way they are perceived by society and by themselves. However, as Hickey (2015) points out, access to music programs is quite limited for justice-involved youth around the United States. Furthermore, Spencer (1997) illuminates the inherent contradiction of teaching the arts to the justice-involved while they are incarcerated: "Education is a democratic enterprise in an authoritarian place" (p. 6). This study aims to examine the relationships between arts educators and the organizations for which they work, the probation officers with whom the educators work, and the correctional institutions in which the educators work.

CRIMINAL DESISTANCE, NOT RECIDIVISM

Traditionally, the barometer for the success of the American justice system has been the rate of *recidivism*, which is "measured by criminal acts that resulted in rearrest, reconviction or return to prison" (National Institute of Justice, 2021). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) adds that this re-offense must occur "during a three-year period following the person's release," but it is unclear how commonly this specific definition and time-period is used. Some studies of arts programs for justice-involved youth found reduced recidivism (Ezell and Levy, 2003; Hickey, 2015), but not always (Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2015).

It is possible that these mixed results are because reduced recidivism is an imperfect measure of a person's movement away from criminal behavior. There is an important distinction between the abovementioned concept of *recidivism* and what is known in criminology as *criminal desistance*, defined as "a series of cognitive, social, and behavioral changes leading up to the cessation of criminal behavior" (Kazemian, 2015). It is easy to conflate these two concepts, but there are important differences, which are explained in the work of leading criminologist Dr. Shadd Maruna. The clearest difference is the three-year period attached to the definition of recidivism by the NIJ. Maruna and Farrall (2004) divide desistance into two processes based on the length of time it takes to complete them: *primary desistance* is any period in which someone does not commit a crime (a concept that essentially conforms to recidivism), while *secondary desistance* is a "reflective, and more *self-conscious* break with previous patterns of offending" (p. 4).[1] Maruna suggests that secondary desistance occurs when the justice-involved person "finds a source of agency and communion in non-criminal activities," and when "[t]he desisting person's change in behavior [sic] is sometimes recognized by others and reflected back to [them]" (Maruna and Farrall, 2004, p. 17). Some scholars, like McNeill (2014), argue that "desistance is a social process as much as a personal one" and that, as a result, a tertiary desistance process should be recognized as well – one that allows the justice-involved person to recognize their membership and partnership in a moral community of shared values.

To summarize, *recidivism* is an external measure of criminal behavior that does not focus on the reasons for the cessation of criminal activity, while *desistance* suggests that the cessation of criminal behavior is rooted in the agency of the individual, but also depends on social acceptance in many respects. Based on the language of the justice-involved, who colloquially refer to desistance as "going straight" or "going legit," Maruna and Farrall (2004) argue that desistance should be considered an ongoing process (p. 5). Furthermore, desistance requires partial reconstruction of one's identity, both in the eyes of society and those of the justice-impacted individual. Maruna and LeBel (2002) suggest that this reconstruction is made more difficult by the status-quo approach of the American justice system – a combination of monitoring (incarceration) and mentoring (parole) that sends mixed messages to the justice-involved and assumes that they are deficient. In fact, Maruna and LeBel (2002) argue that the stigma of being deficient or "criminal" makes a justice-involved individual more likely to commit new offenses (p. 165).

To combat this tendency, Maruna and LeBel (2002) propose a "strengths-based" approach, as opposed to the status-quo, deficit-based approaches of the correctional system (p. 167). "The work of re-entry," they write, "becomes the facilitation of opportunities to make useful contributions and reparation to one's family and community" (p. 172). But as Maruna and Farrall (2003) note, desistance is difficult to document because "it is impossible to know when offending has finally ended until the person is dead" (p. 3). The result is a tendency to measure rehabilitative success through recidivism and lack of recidivism, an imperfect simulacrum of desistance that denies the importance of personal growth and the ongoing process of "going straight" by focusing only on whether someone falls back into criminal behavior even once.

[1] In their review, Cheliotis and Jordanoska (2015) use different definitions of primary and secondary desistance, but this study will use the definitions provided by Maruna and LeBell.

Much of the existing research, and many of the arts organizations and educators included therein, focus on the self-identity reconstruction that Maruna and his colleagues argue is necessary for secondary desistance. However, they typically do not use a criminological framework explicitly when explaining their approach – instead, they often invoke the framework of Positive Youth Development (PYD).

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

PYD emerged as a strengths-based response to the more prevalent deficit-based perspectives on adolescence (Case, 2017 p. 511) – similar to how Maruna and his colleagues responded to a deficit-based perspective on criminal rehabilitation. This framework originated as an approach to preventing problematic youth behavior and for fostering resiliency in young people by increasing their ability to overcome adversity with help from protective factors in their environment (*Positive Youth Development | Youth.Gov*, n.d.). Hickey (2018) outlines the principal tenets of PYD, known as the 5 C's: *competence, confidence, character, caring* and *connection* (p. 4048). She also describes self-determination theory as being at the heart of PYD, which posits that "autonomy, relatedness, and competence are basic human needs" (p. 4048), suggesting that the arts have the potential to cultivate an environment in which self-determination can be learned and attained. Research has found that PYD after-school programs for youth of all racial backgrounds can promote resilience and positive development (Fredricks and Simpkins, 2012), and can have a range of positive outcomes for at-risk youth, including greater social competencies and clearer, more positive self-identities (Case, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2019). Specific to music programs for the justice-involved, Hickey (2018) designed a music program for incarcerated youth in Chicago based on the principles of PYD and found that participants enjoyed the program mainly because of greater feelings of competence and autonomy (pp. 4060-4061).

To foster these feelings, Shieh (2010) writes that an educator must serve as a facilitator and create opportunities for student agency. Barrett and Baker (2010) add that justice-involved youth participants appreciated teachers who were "patient, encouraging, polite, and 'not arrogant'" (p. 256). Thompson (2015) stresses that many of these students already have artistic knowledge and preferences and should be encouraged to express themselves on their own terms. Spencer (1997) writes that educators must be willing to adjust their pedagogy and curriculum to the needs of the participants and the constraints of the teaching environment (p. 10). Case (2017) argues that educators who utilize these teaching practices are creating a "counterspace" that challenges the deficit-based assumptions concerning marginalized groups (p. 512), and that doing so is fully in line with the principles of PYD.

In summary, desistance and Positive Youth Development overlap mainly on the concept of self-identity creation – the process by which a person changes the way they are perceived in their own eyes and in the eyes of society. Secondary desistance argues that self-identity re-creation is necessary to reduce or eliminate the likelihood that a justice-involved person will re-offend. PYD provides a framework by which youth can build the autonomy, competence, and skills to begin that process. Both theoretical writings and research in the field suggest that arts programs for justice-involved youth can provide an environment in which self-identity creation can occur. This can, in turn, can in turn to lead to tertiary desistance and the reacceptance of justice-involved youth into their communities and society at large. Recent news articles suggest that the emergent justice reform movement

favors these approaches over the more punitive ones traditionally applied by the correctional system.

ARTS PROGRAMS FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

When analyzing justice-involved arts programs in the U.S. and around the world, some researchers report advances in participants' artistic skill (Barrett and Baker, 2012; Hickey, 2015), but most focus on extra-artistic outcomes (Hickey, 2015, p. 15). These outcomes range widely, including improved self-esteem (Anderson and Overy, 2010; *Arts in Corrections County Jails Project*, 2019; Barrett and Baker, 2012; Brewster, 2010; Henley *et al.*, 2012; Hickey, 2015; Lazzari *et al.*, 2005); better communication and social skills (*Arts in Corrections County Jails Project*, 2019; Barrett and Baker, 2012; Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016; Harkins *et al.*, 2011; Henley *et al.*, 2012; Lazzari *et al.*, 2005); improvements in mood (*Arts in Corrections County Jails Project*, 2019; Ezell and Levy, 2003; Woodward et al, 2008); and greater confidence and motivation (*Arts in Corrections County Jails Project*, 2019; Harkins *et al.*, 2011; Henley, 2015; Henley *et al.*, 2012). Some studies report that arts programs appear to correspond with improved learning skills (Hickey, 2015) and increase the likelihood that participants will continue pursuing educational opportunities (Anderson and Overy, 2010; Brewster, 2010; Ezell and Levy, 2003). Another consistent finding is improved behavior among incarcerated participants (Anderson and Overy, 2010; *Arts in Corrections County Jails Project*, 2019; Barrett and Baker, 2012; Ezell and Levy, 2003; Harkins *et al.*, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Wolf and Holochwost, 2014). However, many of these studies have shortcomings in their designs, including a lack of control groups, small sample sizes, and selection biases (Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2015 p. 29).

Still, without a doubt, there is a large body of research linking arts programs for the justice-involved (and youth specifically) with positive development and personal growth. This research focuses on extra-artistic outcomes because participation in the arts is not the end goal of these programs. Educators in this space seek to improve the lives and self-perceptions of justice-involved youth. Researchers suggest that the great benefit for justice-involved arts program participants is the opportunity to consciously experiment with new self-identities; participants are given a chance to view themselves as something other than criminal, deficient, or lesser by developing new, different, and often collaborative skills in novel environments and with different groups of people (Barrett and Baker, 2012; Brewster, 2010; Dickie-Johnson and Meek, 2020; Harkins *et al.*, 2011; Lazzari *et al.*, 2005; Woodward *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, these outcomes could be seen as making it less likely for program participants to fall back into criminal behavior.

PURPOSE

Despite all the research addressing how arts programs can be helpful for justice-involved youth, there has been little analysis of the way in which these programs interact with the probation and parole offices and correctional institutions. Almost without exception, data on this subject has been collected secondarily and/or mentioned offhand. For instance, Anderson and Overy (2010), in their study of arts programs at a juvenile detention facility in Scotland, found that "informing the entire staff in the prison about the project was vital in gaining support throughout the prison" (p. 62). Other studies include observations from staff members at juvenile facilities as data points (Barrett and Baker, 2012; Henley, 2012; Hickey,

2015), but little else. Nonetheless, it is essential to know how the interactions between arts educators and organizations, and the justice system and its employees affect the efficacy of arts programs for justice-involved youth.

Part of the issue here is an obvious conflict of interest: researchers and educators need permission from justice system personnel and institutions to conduct their work, and they are understandably less likely to include the difficulties of creating and implementing these programs in their published work for fear of retribution against themselves, their programs, and the youth who participate. They are also likely more motivated to report the successes of their work rather than focusing on the logistical and institutional tensions that their work may help create; in order to maintain positive relationships with the institutions in which they work, they may be reluctant to be overly critical of their shortcomings. Hickey (2015) notes that detention facilities have attempted to improve their public image in the past by publicizing their arts programs, suggesting that certain institutions and personnel may have ulterior motives for the implementation and celebration of these programs. For these and perhaps other reasons, there is a gap in the research regarding the obstacles toward implementing arts programs for justice-involved youth.

My research question is as follows: What are the obstacles faced by arts programs for justice-involved youth when collaborating with the youth justice system in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties?

METHODS

This multiple case study (Creswell and Poth, 2012, pp. 96-103) of arts programming in juvenile detention in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties centers around semi-structured interviews with eight people, all conducted via telephone or video conferencing in the fall of 2020. All study protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Southern California. Participants signed consent forms prior to being interviewed; they and their organizations have been given pseudonyms.

The interviewees (n=7) included probation officers, arts educators, non-profit administrators, and formerly incarcerated youth; several of them had held more than one of these roles. All were recruited through a convenience sampling method characterized by online research followed by outreach via phone and email. These interviews took place in the Fall of 2020 when access to these facilities was limited due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Quednow, 2020). The interviewees discussed their experiences interacting with arts educators, parole employees, and the institutions with which they work. Additionally, they shared their experiences working with incarcerated youth and best practices for working with these youth inside and outside the walls of juvenile hall. All the interviewees have had a chance to review this paper to check for inconsistencies and ensure that they are being represented accurately.

These interviewees—all of whom agreed to let their real names be used—include:

Jeffrey, *Director of Applied Research, Center for Justice through the Arts, Los Angeles County*

Sharon, *Executive Director, Community Empowerment Center, Los Angeles County*

Bonnie and Eric, *Probation Officers and volunteer arts educators, Ventura County*

Benjamin, *Manager, Ventura County Healing Arts*

Jose and Terrance, *former incarcerated children and current staff members of the Center for Justice through the Arts*[2]

In addition to these semi-structured interviews, I researched arts programming in juvenile detention throughout the United States, as well as juvenile programs and facilities, and arts programming providers in these two counties. Finally, because I had no means of interviewing currently incarcerated youth, I utilized several prerecorded interviews that Benjamin recorded with children he encountered in his work for a radio program he hosts. Episodes of this program gave me the opportunity to hear some of the words and thoughts of recently incarcerated children, and to hear their writing and poetry, while still protecting their identities.

Researcher Positionality

I come to this project as a white, heterosexual, cisgender male who grew up with considerable financial and social privilege. While I have been studying the arts and juvenile justice for some time, I have limited experience with the neighborhoods and environments in which many incarcerated youths grow up. My father is a criminal defense attorney and I have been employed by law firms in the past, but I have had few interactions with the justice system. While I am an educator and have worked in a variety of roles in Los Angeles County, I have never worked in juvenile justice facilities and programs, or with justice-involved youth. This project served as a springboard further research on this subject, and has inspired me to explore working with justice-involved youth.

Setting

Los Angeles County, with a population of over 10 million (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, n.d.), is the second largest metropolitan area in the country. It also has the largest juvenile probation system in the United States (Cosgrove, 2020). The Central Juvenile Hall facility covers 22 acres, houses both boys and girls, and has been consistently criticized for poor conditions over the past two decades (*Central and Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall Facilities*, 1999; Cosgrove and Miller, 2021; Sewell, 2014). Central has a long history of arts programming, dating back to at least 1997 (Sewell, 2014). The other facility in the county, Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, is located north of L.A. in the neighborhood of Sylmar. Nidorf, too, is known for substandard conditions (Stiles, 2019; Cosgrove and Miller, 2021). Both facilities are run by the Los Angeles Probation Office and house an average of 254 minors between the ages 8-18 at a time, the vast majority of whom are Latinx or African-American (Cosgrove, 2020; Cosgrove and Miller, 2021). Incarceration at either hall can last anywhere between one day and several months (Tucker, 2011). Both Central and Nidorf have an abundance of non-profit arts programming partners, and there is a great deal of overlap between what is offered at each facility, as well as at a variety of different non-residential probation office facilities for youth in the justice system (Tucker, 2011).

By comparison, Ventura County has a much smaller (less than 850,000) and wealthier population than Los Angeles County. Although both counties have Latinx populations of over 40%, Ventura County has a greater proportion of White inmates

[2] Jose and Terrance are now adults who consented to be a part of this study, and who bravely and generously spoke about their experiences both as justice-involved youth and as educators of justice-involved youth.

than either Los Angeles County or the national average (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, n.d.). VCJF is 80 miles away from downtown Los Angeles, in the coastal city of Oxnard, with a capacity to house 420 minors (*Juvenile Facilities – Ventura County Probation*, n.d.). Like the LA facilities, VCJH typically hosts a wide variety of different arts programs for its residents – everything from radio broadcasting to arts and crafts – although, in total, there appear to be fewer opportunities here than in LA facilities. Almost all these programs are run by non-profit organizations (L. Velador, personal communication, October 2, 2020).

Arts Organizations

This project focused on the programs offered by three organizations. The first is the Community Empowerment Center (CEC), which has worked in juvenile facilities since its founding in 2006. Like many non-profit organizations involved in the juvenile justice system, CEC operates independently and offers other programs outside of this environment. It serves the children housed in Central and Nidorf, as well as the participants in the various camps operated by the Probation Office. The mission of CEC is to provide "healing-informed [sic] mentorship and therapeutic arts to youth, families, and communities serving them" (*(organization website)*. CEC's flagship program is a dance program that "encourage[s] trauma recovery and rehabilitation through rhythm and mental health achievement" by providing therapeutic dance courses and opportunities, along with mentorship support. This dance program specifically refers to "resiliency methods and trust building relationships" as helping youth and communities recover from trauma, which is aligned with PYD and desistance. In 2018, the Dance for Healing Project served more than 300 youth in LA juvenile justice programs (*organization website*.).

The second organization is the Center for Justice through the Arts (CJA); it is a coalition of several non-profit arts organizations whose members coordinate their efforts to provide arts education to incarcerated youth. CJA identifies itself as "an interdisciplinary collaborative that provides exceptional arts programming in order to build resiliency and wellness, eliminate recidivism, and transform the juvenile justice system" (*Center for Justice through the Arts*, n.d.). Essentially, it is a coordinating body for the 14 organizations that make up its membership, all of which offer programming in a wide variety of visual, performing, and writing arts. To maximize its outreach to children in the juvenile system, CJA meets weekly with representatives from each member organization, compiles and analyzes their data together, and shares information and best practices. CJA also coordinates the schedules of all 14 organizations to ensure that a wide variety of classes is available at each of the 30 different sites that is serves. CJA's model appears to be unique for this type of work in the United States, and their description of that model on their website also suggests alignment with PYD and desistance models:

> The power of arts exists on multiple levels - from individual healing and expression that comes from accessing one's creativity, to building community and neighborhood cohesion through art projects and art-making practices that foster self-determination and, more broadly, to advancing opportunities for social change and promoting a more just society. (Organization website)

In 2015, CJA piloted a 5-week, multi-disciplinary arts program at 6 different juvenile detention camps *(organization website)*. This program ran Monday through Friday, offering over 240 students rotating modules of arts disciplines including writing, visual arts, music, and more, culminating in student performances each Saturday. According to Jeffrey, CJA's Director of Applied Research, all of its workshops are designed so that "when CJA comes into a facility

or comes into a park site, if the young person has already participated in a program with one of the members, they recognize the flow of the workshop." This uniformity in the structure of the workshops is designed to accommodate the high turnover rate and frequent transfers within the system.

The third organization is the Ventura County Healing Arts (VCHA), which was founded and funded by the county government, alongside grant money from the California Arts Council's JUMP stARTS program. According to my research, VCHA was the only government-affiliated program operating in either county before the pandemic. The program currently offers classes in guitar, visual arts, and poetry, empowering students to create and perform on their own and with each other. These arts classes are offered in partnership with the on-site school at VCJF.

Findings and Discussion

In analyzing the data gathered in these interviews and the content from the radio show episodes through recurrent readings, annotation, and categorization, three major themes emerged and are discussed below. First, the logistical issues facing arts organizations working with incarcerated youth are discussed. Next, I examine the importance of maintaining contact with these youth upon release and re-entry, and the difficulties of doing so. Lastly, the issues regarding the evaluation of the arts organizations operating in this space are examined.

Logistical Issues Facing Arts Organizations

Hickey (2015) writes that "Perhaps the *only* consistent finding about formal schooling in juvenile detention facilities in this country is that they are perilous" (p. 3). She quotes a study that concluded that "America's juvenile corrections subject confined youth to intolerable levels of violence, abuse, and other forms of maltreatment" (Mendel, 2011, p. 5). Educators often complain that detention center staff often see their role as to continue punishing the children in their care, rather than to help them. And yet, according to multiple interviewees, many of these children think of incarceration as relatively safe and structured compared to the outside world, despite their relatively short sentences, regular fighting, and being constantly shuffled between various correctional facilities and programs. Sharon says that many children "see [certain staff members] as their parents"; Benjamin adds that:

> One kid straight up told me, 'Man, it was better for me in there than it was in any of the foster homes and certainly the home I started out in.' And if that is true, it is no wonder that they're reoffending (Interview).

On Benjamin's radio program, one teen stated that she had been in VCJF on ten separate occasions between the ages of 15-18 Another had this to say of the facility: "I grew up in here, it's my second home"

While California mandates that all children in state custody attend school (*Juvenile Court Schools - Educational Options (CA Dept of Education)*, n.d.), the few surveys that have been conducted have found that arts education is not consistently available in juvenile detention across the country (Hickey, 2014, p. 3). In this regard, both LA and Ventura Counties are exceptional, not just because they offer a variety of arts and therapy programs, but because they have any programs available at all. But even in these counties, there are significant institutional obstacles to implication of these types of programs. In Los Angeles County, for instance, all programming in juvenile detention must be approved by the Probation Office, often requires

multiple proposal revisions, and can take several months to receive final approval (Tucker, 2011, p. iv).

Furthermore, providing the opportunity to participate in the arts is only the first step to enacting these programs. Once a program has been approved, consistency in implementation is extremely difficult. Children's schedules are frequently disrupted by court appearances and transfers to different juvenile halls and camps, or to caretakers. This makes it difficult just to keep track of students, let alone provide them with a consistent education. Units within the facility are differentiated by criminal records, special needs, and other factors, and students are often resettled as units are opened and shut down. Classes are often held in one room on one day, and in another on the next (Tucker, 2011, p. 35). A fight or other disruption in the facility can result in a lockdown, often meaning that programming is cancelled for that day. Donna Tucker (2011), a volunteer student arts educator who worked at Central, wrote that "the reality of the place seemed to be constantly shifting even though the structure and rules are rigid" (p. 35).

Both visiting educators and facility staff have emphasized that it is difficult to provide arts opportunities with consistency because of these ever-changing policies, schedules, and available space. To the participating youth, these changes often seem arbitrary and unpredictable, and are taken as a sign that it is not worth it to try something new and different. Terrance, a former incarcerated child who now teaches with CJA, explains that children often find themselves at the whims of facility staff members who have a great deal of power over, but not a great deal of interest in, their lives:

> We have this thing in camp called 'line-up'… one staff will be mad that a youth didn't line up, now nobody can go to programming because he's ego-tripping with this one youth for whatever situation, and who knows what that [kid] is going through? (Interview)

As Jose, another former incarcerated child, put it, "It demotivates them. Like, why even go? Why even sign up if next week something's gonna happen? So, they are not gonna waste their time to sign up." This suggests an environment that, to say the least, is not conducive to the principles of PYD – to use the Spencer's framework (1997), the authoritarian nature of corrections can defeat the democratic project of the arts educators, undermine the spaces cultivated to encourage artistic self-expression and trivialize attempts to prioritize connections between students and their communities.

It is no surprise, then, that communication and cooperation between the arts organizations and the juvenile halls is frequently difficult. Furthermore, arts educators say they often face uncooperative probation office staff who do not support the arts programming. This can result in an almost adversarial relationship between them. Staff members suggested that word of mouth, and the validation from their peers that this implies, is the most effective way to recruit students. This means that earning the trust of the students who show up to a program is important for its long-term efficacy. Some students, like Terrance, have had a passion for, and some experience with, the arts from an early age. Others, like Jose, have not. The trick, according to Jose, is patience. Arts educators should encourage students to attend their workshops and make it clear that each student is welcome to participate at their own pace and on their own terms. Ventura County probation officer Eric notes that any vulnerability in a juvenile hall can be seen as a weakness, so the children need to feel that they will not be disrespected for the art they produce.

Once students have taken the step to participate, it is vital that instructors follow culturally relevant pedagogies to engage them in meaningful ways that honor and celebrate their identities. Research suggests that the efficacy of arts programs in carceral settings is correlated to their ability to create an environment that is more democratic and egalitarian than that of the authoritarian experience of involvement in the justice system (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Tuastad & O'Grady, 2013). To this end, many arts organizations describe their approaches as student-centered (Woodward *et al.*, 2007; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016) and/or taking a culturally relevant approach to their programming (Ezell & Levy, 2003; Baker and Homan, 2007). Benjamin found that enthusiasm drops dramatically in classes when he teaches in a lecture format. Most of these children have not had success in school environments. One young man described his frustration with his English class: "It's too formal...they have us do too much, like, writing exercises that have nothing to do with what I'm interested in." Yet through participation in VCHA, this same young man became a prolific poet in VCJF and even competed in a county-wide poetry recitation competition

None of this should be surprising, considering the deep trust issues that many incarcerated children have developed from their difficult childhoods. As Sharon notes, "…it was important for the quality of a program for someone to come in, the person who didn't just want to teach them this skill, but to establish a relationship where there was trust." One way to establish this trust is to give children agency and ownership over what and how they are learning. Ventura County probation officer, Bonnie, notes that, "If I want them to buy into it, they have to be able to steer the ship a little bit. I cannot be the only one steering it."

Release and Re-Entry

Educators and formerly incarcerated children both emphasize the importance of maintaining contact after the student is released. As Bonnie says, "the goal is to start here and get them to continue doing it when they leave." To this end, CJA recently created a re-entry program to support their students after they have left detention, and in many cases employ their students as well. Few organizations have the means to formalize a re-entry program to the extent that CJA does, and so the educators endeavor to support their students on their own time. For example, Bonnie was so impressed by the talent and potential of a girl who was recently released from VCJF that she personally called the girl's probation officer to see if they could steer her towards a music program at a local non-profit organization. Benjamin has taken his VCHA poetry class to continuation schools in Ventura County and wants to do more of this work. These efforts really can make a difference – Jose described how his CJA mentor would keep in consistent contact with his mom: "That would keep me busy...instead of like, going out with my homies, doing all that again." This type of mentorship and support appears to help guide students through their transition from secondary to tertiary desistance, as they attempt to rejoin their communities and be recognized for their new identities.

But of course, there is only so much that arts educators can do once these children are back in the world, for they are usually returning to the same precarious circumstances in which they found themselves before incarceration. Benjamin describes how children often lose or switch phones and constantly change addresses – in one instance, he finally tracked down one former student and got her on the phone, only to realize quickly that she was under the influence at that very moment. The unstable, unsafe environments that contributed to the children entering the juvenile justice system are the same ones that make it difficult for arts organizations

to keep contact with their students once they are "on the outs." As Sharon says, many children tell her they reoffend upon release from juvenile hall because their experience with incarceration is safer than in the streets, and the institution has more resources than their communities. Students often tell Sharon that incarceration was their only time having access to three meals a day. Students who are unhoused have admitted to committing crimes during the holidays because they wanted shelter, or so they could be with their favorite probation officers who demonstrated care and concern for their well-being. To reuse an earlier quote from Benjamin: "If that's true, it's no wonder that they're reoffending." Many of these justice-involved students, regardless of their commitment to secondary desistance, do not feel they are a part of the moral community McNeill cites as necessary to tertiary desistance upon their release.

Evaluating Arts Programming

Both Sharon and Jeffrey described the difficulty of compiling quantitative data regarding the efficacy of their programs. In addition to all the issues outlined previously, Sharon explained that the distrust many students have of authority figures can skew the data gathered from juvenile detention centers. Students in these facilities are accustomed to being studied and then dismissed. – Sharon recalls that:

> Our first day during a walk through the kids told us, 'I am not your statistic, and I bet these people are not gonna come back. People never do, they just come and look at us and we never see them again. (Interview)

Another complicating factor for effective evaluation is, as Jeffrey points out, that it is almost impossible to have a control group for these studies. Furthermore, between these interviews and the existing literature, it became clear that opinions and approaches differ widely as to how success in this field should be measured. For instance, Jeffrey rejected the notion that recidivism should be a metric of success because "when you have a system that is designed to over-police communities of color and youth of color, the results kind of speak for themselves." Research often states that a causal relationship between arts programming and desistance was almost impossible to determine.

However, when all the obstacles to implementing and evaluating these programs are overcome, the resulting evidence shows that changes in these children's lives can be dramatic and meaningful, which is consistent with the existing literature. One child explained how writing poetry helped her address her anger toward her father and his struggles with drug addiction:

> When I feel like I have no one to talk to I just write it down, you know, or when I start thinking about him I just write it as if I'm writing it to him…It's better than keeping it all in like I usually do. (Interview)

Jeffrey says that his analysis has demonstrated that arts programming has resulted in significant improvements in students' emotional and social learning skills (CJA's chosen barometers for program success). Through journal entries and class discussion, many of these programs look for changes in self-confidence, relationships, social skills, and musical competence (Hickey, 2018). Benjamin says that staff have noticed improvements in student behavior, too: "… if they're being honest, the staff people will say, '…when you come in and start teaching poetry on the unit, I just know there are going to be fewer…outbursts or arguments that evening. It makes my job easier.'"

CONCLUSION

The inescapable conclusion of this project was that greater cooperation between probation offices and arts educators is necessary to maximize the benefits of arts programs in juvenile detention. Arts educators and administrators often say that it is the detention facilities themselves and the probation offices that run them that determine how consistent these programs can be, and by extension, determine how many opportunities program participants have to reshape their identities in a manner consistent with secondary desistance. At every facility, educators complained about a lack of communication when lockdowns occur or when the location of the program within the facility has changed. Children complained that their access to programs was often restricted for seemingly arbitrary reasons. These issues seemed particularly prevalent in LA County, which has long been at the forefront of this type of programming for justice-involved youth. As the rest of the United States moves to implement similar programs in their correctional systems, and as the scope and reach of arts organizations working in this space continues to grow, it will be important for arts educators and administrators to make proactive efforts to prevent these issues from arising.

Administrators in Ventura County, by contrast, have taken some steps to minimize these issues. VCJF has a hotline that is constantly updated to reflect which units are accessible to visitors. They also have implemented a behavioral ranking system that determines whether students are allowed to attend classes, rather than leaving it up to individual staff members. (It is unclear if either of these policies exist in LA County – neither was mentioned in interviews). These appear to be effective means of maintaining the necessary accessibility and consistency.

There are ways for the arts organizations to make their presence more consistent onsite. Benjamin recommends keeping educational materials to a minimum so that the program can be easily held anywhere within the facility, rather than requiring unwieldy equipment, a drum set, for example. Perhaps most importantly, cooperation among multiple arts organizations operating in the same facilities and correctional systems can be enormously effective at providing dependability and variety in programming. Sharing data, coordinating schedules so that multiple arts opportunities are offered at each facility, and creating a uniform framework for all their workshops has allowed CJA to provide students with a cohesive arts education regardless of the facility they are housed in, or the program in which they are participating. Lastly, although there are little data on this issue, educators frequently expressed a belief that the most effective arts programs are those that maintain contact with their students once they have left incarceration. However, these practices have all been limited in their effectiveness by policies regarding contact with minors, the attitudes of the correctional institutions and/or parole and probation offices, and the limited resources of the arts programs themselves.

Benjamin stressed how more consistent communication between his program and the Ventura County probation office has made running his program easier for him, his students, and probation officers at the Juvenile Hall (I thought it was possible that this was because he too was a government employee). Because so much of CJA's approach seems to arise from past coordination and communication issues with the LA Probation Office, I asked Jeffrey if he thought that greater integration with (or perhaps even management by) the agency might improve the situation. However, Jeffrey's experience has made him, in his words, cynical: "I just think the system has too much power and it's too problematic to really rely on it as something that is going to…solve these issues." Jeffrey believes that the

correctional institutions and probation offices have fundamentally different goals than those of the arts educators with whom he works, and until that changes, it is unlikely that a solution will come from within that system.

Both of these dynamics – the benefits of greater communication and coordination, and the tension between the divergent goals of arts educators and parole, probation, and correctional staff – can be found in analysis of the most recent arts program at the VCJF. This program was created during the pandemic because the probation officers who founded it, Bonnie and her colleague Eric, saw a lack of opportunities for children in the facility once visitors were no longer allowed. While the Probation Office has supported this program (the officers are paid for their time and received funding for some instruments), the two officers independently created this program and complement the limited support they have received by bringing in their own personal instruments. This is clear evidence that probation offices and correctional institutions are not always receptive to the benefits that arts programming offer to the children in their care. On the one hand, it is shocking and depressing that probation offices are outsourcing to independent contractors what should be seen as a principal institutional duty; on the other, given the negative view of arts programs held by many probation offices, it may be for the best that these programs are managed by arts educators from outside the institution. In the current juvenile justice system, it seems rare to find employees—let alone institutions as a whole—that take the position of Bonnie: “These kids are there. They committed crimes. But it is not our job to further punish them.”

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