



To My Beloved Family Inside,

MY NAME IS EDWIN PARAGAS AND I AM A COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FELLOW FOR THE TRANSFORMATIVE IN-PRISON WORKGROUP (TPW).

The TPW is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals that believe in the transformative and healing benefits of community-based in-prison programs. Our main goal is to expand funding for transformative and healing programs. The TPW has prison abolitionist values and partakes in a visionary campaign to decarcerate.

I wholeheartedly represent and invest my time and cause to the TPW. Day and night TPW members are in a constant tug of war with CDCR about our mission to take down barriers so you can be a part of the transformative and healing power of dedicated community-based organizations. We are engaged in much meaningful policy work, champion the narrative of more human-based treatment and language in CDCR, and have helped win more and more funding for CBOs.

Not only am I representing TPW, I am also a formerly incarcerated person that--six months ago--earned my freedom after 23 years in prison. I served time in prisons up and down the state of California, multiple SHU terms, and lived in 180-design prisons for over 20 years. With the help of community-based organizations and self-help classes, I was able to become a person that cultivated resiliency and changed the ways of my colored past and present tribulation. In turn, I ended up empowering myself and transcending my environment.

I say this to say that I, and many out here, can, in a way, understand and see how you are enduring these tribulations and soul crawling experiences. **We also understand the steps you are taking with not seeing the movement of time but the movement of your mind.** We know that your endurance and your conviction to survive have manifested you to become a higher expression of yourself. We also understand that, while concentration on these feats alone is difficult enough, it is even more formidable when we are entangled with the COVID-19 pandemic.

That brings me to the purpose of this newsletter: The community-based organizations and citizens out in the street that want you to know that we hear your echoes and concerns. We hear how the conditions are horrible and frightening. The unknown and the lack of transparency from CDCR and our government speaks volume to the seriousness of this crisis. We hear your voices and plead for a response to this pandemic from CDCR that is based on our shared humanity.

Rest assured that we are not quiet at this moment -- a moment that will define us when we are before the halls of judgment. Just being a witness to the tragedy is no longer an option. Many agents of change are raising the alarm to who can hear and have feelings in their souls. Please know that we are doing everything we can to challenge the laws and policies and get people to move on the one true way to protect incarcerated people-- decarceration.

My beloved family, you are not forgotten. We are stirred by your destitute condition. We are out here hearing you, feeling you, and caring for you. We will do everything in our power to protect you. There are many of us in the streets fighting hard for you all. Like a beloved wife that drives as close as she can to prison grounds every day to write her husband. She does this in hopes that her husband can feel her love near him when she is writing her letter. That's the type of people who are out here for all of my brothers and sisters.

Fight On.

2020 Leadership Team

Ayla Benjamin
Buddhist Pathways Prison Project

Amanda Berger
Insight Garden Program

Richard Cruz
Ahimsa Collective

Tyee Griffith
The Claremont Colleges

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Success Stories

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Exchange Program

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Edwin Paragas
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We Are The TPW!

The Transformative In-Prison Workgroup is a statewide coalition of in-prison programs and program providers. The Transformative In-Prison Workgroup (TPW) is on a mission to ensure that all people living in California prisons have access to meaningful, high quality programs, and to accelerate the impact of recent sentencing reforms towards our North Star goal of decarceration. Together, we know we can break isolation, share ideas, and build political power to have statewide influence. We are committed to centering the leadership of individuals who have been directly affected by incarceration. To practice this value, we ensure that the TPW's leadership team and committees include and elevate formerly incarcerated individuals and families affected by incarceration.

What Have We Accomplished So Far?

The TPW engages in policy advocacy, organizing, and mobilizing in order to responsibly and effectively guide decisions around in-prison programming in California prisons. We are proud to support and drive groundbreaking reforms to make communities safer and transform lives.

While we are a large coalition and in-prison programming is varied in its application, we remain flexible and have been able to pivot to focus on needs during the pandemic such as advocating to ensure you can safely access programs during indeterminate lockdowns and quarantines, and advocating that the CDCR reinstate and expand Rehabilitative Achievement Credits (RAC) so that you can earn time off of your sentence by participating in correspondence programs. If we win this, access to both CBO programs and RAC will be extended to every person living in California prisons, significantly shortening individuals sentences and driving decarceration. Additionally, we have prioritized providing technical assistance and learning communities for members on navigating COVID-19 and converting their programming to correspondence and technology.

At the TPW, we push for more intentionality and advocate for more robust rehabilitative programming budgets. We ask that CDCR align their spending with the majority of Californians' values which reflect a belief in transformation and restoration. Over the past two years the TPW and our allies have doubled funding for in-prison programs and collectively secured an additional \$5 million in permanent annual state funding for community-based in-prison programs. We are launching a campaign to advocate for far more funding for CBO-led in-prison programming. With this campaign, we hope to increase the number of restorative programs for you to access.

How Can You Get Involved?

As you see there are countless CBO's who are a part of powerful TPW coalition. We work and move as one to ensure the betterment of the folks inside. We will still continue to grow and if you know any other CBO's that will be a perfect fit, please write one of TPW programs that you are involved with and let them know.

Also, if you can find time drop a note or two and let your transformative program provider know how you are doing. Stay engage with them. If they are sending curriculum show your appreciation by participating. Give feedback about what works and doesn't work with the correspondence curriculum.

"It's not about perfect. It's about effort. And when you implement that effort into your life every single day that's where transformation happens. That's where change occurs. Keep going. Remember why you started." - Edwin Paragas, TPW Community Organizing Fellow

TPW Members

- Ahimsa Collective
- All of Us or None
- Anti-Recidivism Coalition
- Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network
- Asian Prisoner Support Committee
- Awareness Into Domestic Abuse
- Barrios Unidos
- Buddhist Pathways
- California Coalition for Women Prisoners
- California Reentry Institute
- Catalyst Foundation
- Center For Council
- Choices For Freedom
- Coaching for Healing and Non-Violence
- Coaching for Healing, Justice and Liberation
- Compassion Prison Project
- Claremont Colleges: Criminal Justice Initiative
- Community Works West
- Creative Acts
- Defy Ventures
- Hustle 2.0
- Family UNity Network
- Getting Out by Going In
- GRIP Training Institute
- IMPACT CARE Program
- Initiate Justice
- InsideOUT Writers
- Insight Garden Program
- Insight Prison Project
- Occidental College/Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program
- Jail Guitar Doors
- Last Mile
- Lioness Tale
- Paws for Life
- Prison Arts Project / William James Association
- Place4Grace
- Prison Education Project
- Prison Yoga Project
- Project Rebound, CSU Fresno
- Project Rebound, SFSU
- Project Rebound, CSUS
- ReEvolution
- Re:store Justice
- Root and Rebound
- Safer Communities Project/BayNVC
- TheatreWorkers Project
- UnCommon Law
- Yolo Conflict Resolution Center