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Photo by CCWF TV Specialist R. Quinlan

OMCP Graduates Celebrate with Families and Peers

By Amber Bray

Substance use disorder and addiction affect countless people across the globe. But 16 Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) residents are hoping to change that by becoming certified Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) counselors.

As of July 17, they celebrated the first part of that journey – the completion of a six-month educational study through the Occupational Mentor Certification Program (OMCP).

The ceremony took place in the visiting room, decorated in purple and gold with black accents. Signs reading "Congratulations, Graduate!" were posted while gold and purple balloons and streamers lined the walls. As participants walked into the room, they passed through shimmery purple streamers, which helped lend a festive air to the room.

Prior to the start of the ceremony, guests mingled and chatted while upbeat music played. Invitees received a program outlining the schedule of events, complete with color photos of the graduates. As family members looked through the pages, smiles and tears appeared at the sight of their loved ones' faces.

As "Pomp and Circumstance" rang out in the room, OMCP graduates walked in wearing purple caps and gowns, adorned with a gold OMCP sash. Most striking were the smiles they wore as they proceeded past all assembled and took their seats in rows.

The OMCP training is rigorous and requires a great deal of personal and professional commitment, according to Paper Trail Managing Editor Kanoa Harris-Pendang, an OMCP graduate.

As the staff member overseeing the Division of Rehabilitative Programs (DRP) classes at CCWF, Correctional Counselor III Flavilla Singleton supervises all integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment classes, including the OMCP training. Serving as the event's MC, Singleton welcomed all assembled and shared that the graduates have "done something extraordinary inside these walls."

All OMCP graduates were hand-selected, but many thought they wouldn't be chosen. In order to be considered, interested individuals have to submit an application, obtain two staff references, and sit through an interview by a three-person panel.

"Thank you for proving me right," Singleton told them. "I knew you could do it. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey."

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Rodriguez Sentenced

CCWF Paper Trail analyzes root causes and possible solutions to sexual abuse in prison

By Amber Bray

One of the biggest sexual assault cases in the history of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) came to a close on Thursday, Aug. 14, 2025, when Judge Katherine Rigby sentenced former corrections officer Gregory Rodriguez to 224 years in prison.

The sentence follows his conviction of 62 felonies and two misdemeanors on Jan. 14, 2025. The charges include rape, attempted sodomy, and rape under color of authority. Rodriguez had been under investigation for part of the approximately nine years he worked at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). After leaving the institution in 2022, he was arrested by Madera County officials on May 24, 2023.

While the allegations against Rodriguez have received the most publicity, he is not the only CCWF employee to face scrutiny. In the prison's 30-plus years of operation, incarcerated individuals have made many allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct by correctional staff, medical personnel, and ancillary staff, as witnessed

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Community Connect Workshop Spends a Weekend at CCWF

By Kanoa Harris-Pendang

On July 26 and 27, 2025, a first-of-its-kind event for Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) and the entire state was held inside the Main Yard gymnasium.

The two-day workshop called "Community Connect" was filled with multiple "how-to" presentations on legislative advocacy, civic engagement, how to build policy teams and co-ops in prison, and the importance of power mapping and building support networks. Participants also discussed topics relating to the LGBTQIA+ community, parole board, accountability, restorative justice, and climate.

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Q&A

Popular Recreational Sports at CCWF

Recreation coach G. Martinelli talks training at any age

By Erica Olson

G. Martinelli serves as the recreational coach for Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). He works with multiple departments to ensure that there is something available for everyone. "The goal is inclusion for all," said Martinelli. He gives as much as he can while he is at CCWF.

Q: What is your sports background?

A: I started playing sports when I was young, maybe four or five years old. I played in middle school, high school, and into college. Before working at CCWF, I was a P.E. teacher for eight years for grades kindergarten through 12, coaching various sports.

Q: Why did you leave teaching in school for coaching in a prison?

A: I wanted to try to make a bigger impact. Rather than going with instructing the students, I decided to try to impact the adults in order to change the lives of the kids. That way everybody lives with a healthier mind, body and spirit.

Q: Do you have a favorite part of your job? If so, what?

A: There is not one thing that I would consider my favorite. I do fitness training with the residents assigned to the Firehouse. I go to A Yard [the Reception Facility] and also go to Building 505, where residents who have mobility concerns are housed. I try to include everyone in the whole prison as best I can. That's why we have recreation equipment in the housing units and recreation boxes on the yards.

Q: Can you give me a brief overview of the machines and activities that are offered in the gym?

A: There is a cardio room with several different machines designed to keep the heart rate going. There is a fitness bag and spin cycles. There are opportunities to play pickleball, volleyball, basketball, cornhole, and there are body weights that can be used for strength training. We also offer a High Intensity Interval Training or HIIT. In addition, there are board games and card games in the general population housing units.

Q: For residents who have not engaged in any fitness for a while, what advice would you give them?

A: Start by getting the body moving. Walking is a good starter. Set small goals for yourself and create a building block system where you do a little bit more each time. Staying consistent is important as well.

Q: What are your top tips for staying active?

A: Set goals for yourself, try new things, and do the best you can. It is better to start small and build from there. Create a plan that is specific for you and maintain consistency. Having an accountability partner helps.

Q: How can CCWF residents find out about upcoming sporting events or tournaments?

A: A recreational event calendar is generated monthly. A hard copy is distributed to all the housing units to be placed in a visible location. A digital copy of the calendar is put on the GTL tablets. There will be flyers posted for the tournaments, which include the games in the housing units. There are sign-up sheets that accompany the flyers so that everyone has the option to sign up if they so choose.

Q: Any closing thoughts?

A: Physical activity is the key to having a healthy mind, body, and spirit.


Photo by CCWF TV Specialist R. Quinlan

G. Martinelli playing pickleball at CCWF's gym.

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CCWF PAPER TRAIL IS A PIONEERING PUBLICATION THAT SERVES THE LARGEST WOMEN'S PRISON IN THE WORLD. IT ENGAGES WITH COMMUNITY, PROMOTES HOPE, CREATES POSITIVE SOLUTIONS, AND AMPLIFIES VOICES RARELY HEARD.

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COVER STORY: OMCP GRADUATES

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Chief Deputy Warden Cynthia Rojas addressed the graduates, sharing that all assembled were celebrating their transformation.

"This is a new beginning, not just for yourselves but for others," she said. "Even in one of the hardest places for growth, change is possible."

Options Recovery Services provides instruction and training for the OMCP program. Executive Director Justin Phillips commended the graduates for contributing to the fight against the disease of addiction.

"Counselors choose a path of selflessness," Phillips said. "But counseling is not always met with grace and wonderfulness."

Mychal Macias, a former CCWF resident and OMCP graduate, was paroled in 2024. He is employed as an Admissions Group Counselor in the community and congratulated the graduates on their achievement.

"This is just the beginning of your greatness," he said.

OMCP graduate Hannah Habibi read the cohort's mission statement, which included the words "HOPE," for "Help Other People Excel."

The cohort named themselves "Chapter Seven" because they are the seventh cohort in a women's facility, and they feel the program represents a new chapter in their lives.

"We're not stuck in the past," Habibi said.

After the speeches concluded, graduates received their certificates, shaking hands with administrators and instructors and laughing and smiling on the way down the line. When each arrived in front of

Photos by CCWF TV Specialist R. Quinlan

Lacey Crenshaw and Caitlyn Rose Crenshaw embrace each other (top left). Carmel Murphy and her proud father (top right). Nancy Mendoza and her family (bottom left). Chaylin Funez-Calderon holding her diploma (bottom right).

Singleton, all of them embraced her, an inside joke among the graduates based on the fact that Singleton does not like hugs.

Singleton later laughingly remarked, "I hug my husband and kids from time to time, but after this, no more hugs for the rest of the year."

OMCP graduates then assembled in front of the guests and performed a line dance to celebrate their achievement. Guests clapped and cheered the graduates on, at which point Singleton and DRP Officer Teresa White joined the group to more applause.

Guests were offered barbecue chicken, tri-tip and pulled pork, macaroni and cheese, potato salad, green salad and toasted bread for lunch, as well as a drink and a piece of cake. Conversations between guests dipped in volume as everyone enjoyed their food.

Janet Mendes, CCWF resident Lacey Crenshaw's mother, attended the ceremony to see her daughter graduate.

"I knew she could do it," Mendes said.

Resident Unique Bishop's aunt, Shana Neal, said, "I'm very proud. I've seen the change in her."

OMCP mentor Sandra Shayne completed her training more than four years ago and continues to believe in its impact.

"I believe this is a fantastic program," Shayne said. "It requires a person to truly dig deep in order to find what went wrong in life and allow healing for childhood wounds."

Now that they've completed the training, the graduates must accrue 2,080 internship hours and pass an accredited exam to become certified AOD counselors.

They can then co-facilitate groups with outside AOD counselors with state-mandated curricula, conduct one-on-one sessions, provide crisis intervention, and offer mentorship to their peers.

OMCP graduate Diana Estrada is excited to help other people and is looking forward to getting her certification.

"I feel like my dark story isn't a dark story anymore," said Estrada.

COVER STORY: COMMUNITY CONNECT

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Resources were also provided by the event sponsors: Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC), Initiate Justice (IJ), Initiate Justice Action, the Mend Collaborative, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition (SWFC), and Five Keys Home Free.

"The goal is to educate and build community so people feel empowered to change their environment," said April Grayson from Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition (SWFC). The room was filled with many folks from different walks of life, education levels, and sentences, but on this weekend, none of that mattered.

Musician, filmmaker, and community organizer, Thanh Tran, and Initiate Justice Community Advocacy Manager Inside, Lee Gibson, kicked off the event.

Tran hyped up the crowd with a catchy refrain: "When I say 'Community,' you all say, 'Connect.'"

Over the next two days, those two words roared repeatedly throughout the gym, reminding everyone present of the event's intent.

Community Vectors by Vecteezy

In reflecting on his incarceration, Tran said, "I wished I had community when I was inside, so we're bringing community now."

This was the first time most participants had been introduced to the legislative process, how bills are passed, and how incarcerated folks have contributed. CCWF resident Leylani Simmons said she felt she never had a say in the process, but the event changed her mind.

"Now, understanding the verbiage, it helps me understand what I can do for myself," Simmons said. "I feel empowered." This was the feeling throughout both days.

When reflecting on the co-op portion of the presentation, Claudia Ceseña from EBC stated, "This may feel new, but we already have these community-building skills; we just need to use them."

During breaks and lunch, the teams intermingled with residents, elaborating on their area of expertise, showing solidarity, or just sharing a few laughs.

"I enjoyed getting all the resources I needed, and I had fun," said Madeline Spooner, who has only been at CCWF a few months.

Moving forward, organizers want to be guided by the women. "We want to bring this to hard-to-reach, underserved prisons," Tran said. In the future, IJ hopes to bring a bill clinic to CCWF to inform residents about the legislative process.

COMMENTARY

COVER STORY: C/O SENTENCED

..CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

by those of us who lived here during those years.

How did Rodriguez manage to assault so many women? And why has this problem been so long-standing at CCWF and other women's prisons across the country?

In order to understand the problem and point out possible solutions, I read through dozens of research articles on the topic from the fields of law and criminology. I also talked to several CCWF residents and other stakeholders. Many spoke on condition of anonymity in order to give information as to how Rodriguez operated. Two long-term CCWF residents were willing to go on the record to share their perspectives.

When invited to provide a comment for this story, the CDCR Office of Public and Employee Communications said, "The sentencing of Gregory Rodriguez reaffirms CDCR's own internal investigation and referral to the Madera County District Attorney's Office in 2022. The department resolutely condemns any staff member – especially a peace officer who is entrusted to enforce the law – who violates their oath and shatters public trust."

THE (UNIVERSAL) PROBLEM OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Mainstream media outlets, including The Los Angeles Times, The Associated Press, and The Guardian, reported that 22 incarcerated individuals were identified as victims of Rodriguez. CCWF residents know that many more women were approached by the officer during his tenure at the institution.

For this piece, I spoke to many people who were at CCWF at the same time as Rodriguez. Some referred to Rodriguez as a "trick" (a man who will pay for sex) while others avoided him altogether. Some residents tried to politely interact with him, unsure of the best way to avoid conflict or the potential for a physical interaction. Yet other residents chose to entertain his advances to ascertain what benefits they could receive, generally in the form of contraband brought into the institution or an unmonitored phone call made from his office in the Board of Parole Hearings area, where he worked.

"People are vulnerable, broken. People want attention. A lot of times, abuse starts with jokes and innocent banter but there's manipulation behind it," said Mimi Le, an incarcerated resident who has been in prison for more than 20 years and currently serves as CCWF Inmate Advisory Council Secretary.

Carmel Murphy, a CCWF resident of more than 15 years, echoed those sentiments, adding, "We're easy prey. We're lonely, traumatized. People may not be in contact with their families. They're looking for some type of intimacy."

Research backs up Le's and Murphy's observations. Incarcerated women tend to have histories of abuse that predate their incarceration. The Council on Criminal Justice reports that 90% of women with criminal justice involvement have experienced some form of childhood trauma; between half and three-quarters of women surveyed report experiences of sexual violence. And according to the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, the likelihood of an incarcerated person being subject to sexual abuse is about 30 times higher than that of a non-incarcerated person.

Although some residents may have entertained Rodriguez's advances, it is important to understand that sexual contact between a staff member and an incarcerated individual is always considered abuse. That's true in all 50 states and in the federal system, "regardless of consent," according to ACLU attorney Tasha Hill, whose research has focused on sexual abuse in California prisons.

It's also important to understand

"The Council on Criminal Justice reports that 90% of women with criminal justice involvement have experienced some form of childhood trauma; between half and three-quarters of women sampled report experiences of sexual violence."

that while Rodriguez has been the most publicized abuser from CCWF, he is not alone. Multiple staff members have been terminated from CCWF – "walked off" in the common parlance – based on allegations of sexual misconduct. Over the 27 years that I have been incarcerated at CCWF, I have personally observed staff members being escorted off the grounds due to allegations of sexual assault. But, until Rodriguez, no staff member has ever been convicted of sexual misconduct.

This is not just a CCWF problem. Even though Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003, acknowledging the wide scope of assault and setting a "zero-tolerance standard" for prison rape prosecution is not common. For the 2013 book "Prison Rape: An American Institution?" legal scholar Michael Singer found that out of more than 150,000 estimated assaults, only a few thousand are prosecuted annually.

REPORTING ASSAULT, THE PROBLEM, AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Research from the University of South Dakota and others has found that sexual misconduct is prevalent in prisons but highly underreported.

One reason is that it's common practice to allow staff members to retire or resign before an investigation closes. According to attorney Emma L. Bruder, as many as a third are given this option, "meaning there [is] no public record of what exactly transpired and nothing preventing them from getting another similar job at another facility."

Another reason, as legal scholar Kim Shayo Buchanan explains, is that incarcerated women have real concerns their reports will not remain confidential and that they will "be at the mercy of their abusers, with no opportunity for escape."

Retaliation can take many forms. "It could be physical, it could be a room search," Le said. Another common tactic is the threat of transfer. "For some minor infraction that's usually overlooked, a Rules Violation Report could be generated,' Le elaborated, "and if that person was in an honor dorm, they're now moved from their housing unit.

Individuals at CCWF expressed these concerns and more – such as not being believed, feeling isolated, and being blamed by their peers. Many are influenced by the code of silence that has long existed, or don't understand the reporting process.

Le and Murphy shared some concrete changes CCWF and other prisons can implement to make the reporting process easier.

For incarcerated individuals debating whether to report an assault, counselors should be able to advise them about what reporting can entail. This should include the fact that victims have to speak to investigators, and there is a possibility they will have to testify in court.

Importantly, these counselors should not be mandated reporters, as a victim has to be the one to decide when – or whether – to report an assault. To make the process safer and more confidential, Murphy suggests that "the person receiving the report shouldn't be intertwined with CDCR. They should be an outside entity that's trusted and not biased."

In addition to anonymity, Le mentioned that people need to be able to recognize what grooming looks like. "Perpetrators thrive when they can isolate individuals," she said, "so if women here know the signs, they can recognize what's going on."

When investigating claims of sexual assault, residents I spoke to agree that victims brave enough to come forward should be believed instead of doubted. Perspective is incredibly important in framing an investigation. Eliminating confirmation bias towards staff will help investigations proceed fairly. Given that only one officer has been found guilty in a court of law may speak to how investigations were conducted in the past.

Sexual harassment is difficult for incarcerated individuals to substantiate. Although CCWF has hundreds of cameras throughout the institution as part of the Audio Visual Surveillance System (AVSS) and officers are required to wear Body Worn Cameras (BWCs), these measures cannot capture all aspects of sexual harassment.

For example, an officer looking at an incarcerated person inappropriately, such as staring at her breasts, cannot be recorded due to the placement of BWCs and the AVSS. If an officer turns off their BWC, any sexually harassing remark will not be preserved.

"Even with the cameras, BWCs are turned off frequently. AVSS isn't monitored unless a 'triggering event' occurs," said Le. She also pointed out that "cameras can be open to interpretation. For example, if I touch your arm, a person can say I pushed them but I can say I was moving them out of the way."

Le added that abuse becomes normalized when both the incarcerated and the staff see the problem but don't say anything.

Even with all the work that needs to be done to improve upon the current system, progress has been made over the years.

For example, if an incarcerated individual was accused of being "overfamiliar" with a staff member 20 years ago, that person was rehoused in Administrative Segregation pending an investigation, the result of which was more often than not a prison transfer. That type of conduct no longer occurs, which is a major improvement.

Incarcerated individuals can call rape crisis hotlines as well as the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to request assistance or report what has happened to them. Posters with information, including phone numbers for rape crisis hotlines and the OIG are located in housing unit dayrooms. Incarcerated individuals can also file anonymous administrative grievances so staff misconduct can be reported without fear of retaliation. Though the individual filing the grievance will not be informed of the outcome of the investigation, the information will be investigated nonetheless.

ACKNOWLEDGING RESILIENCE

At CCWF, the majority of those incarcerated try to find meaning in the things that happen. We search for a silver lining, however elusive it may be.

Rodriguez harmed countless individuals, traumatizing and re-traumatizing those he victimized and those who witnessed his actions. But individuals at CCWF are resilient. We are not defined by the things that have happened to us. We look for opportunities to tell our stories and share our lived experience.

We appreciate the fact that the California Legislative Women's Caucus visited CCWF in January 2024, in large part because of the publicity Rodriguez's case garnered.

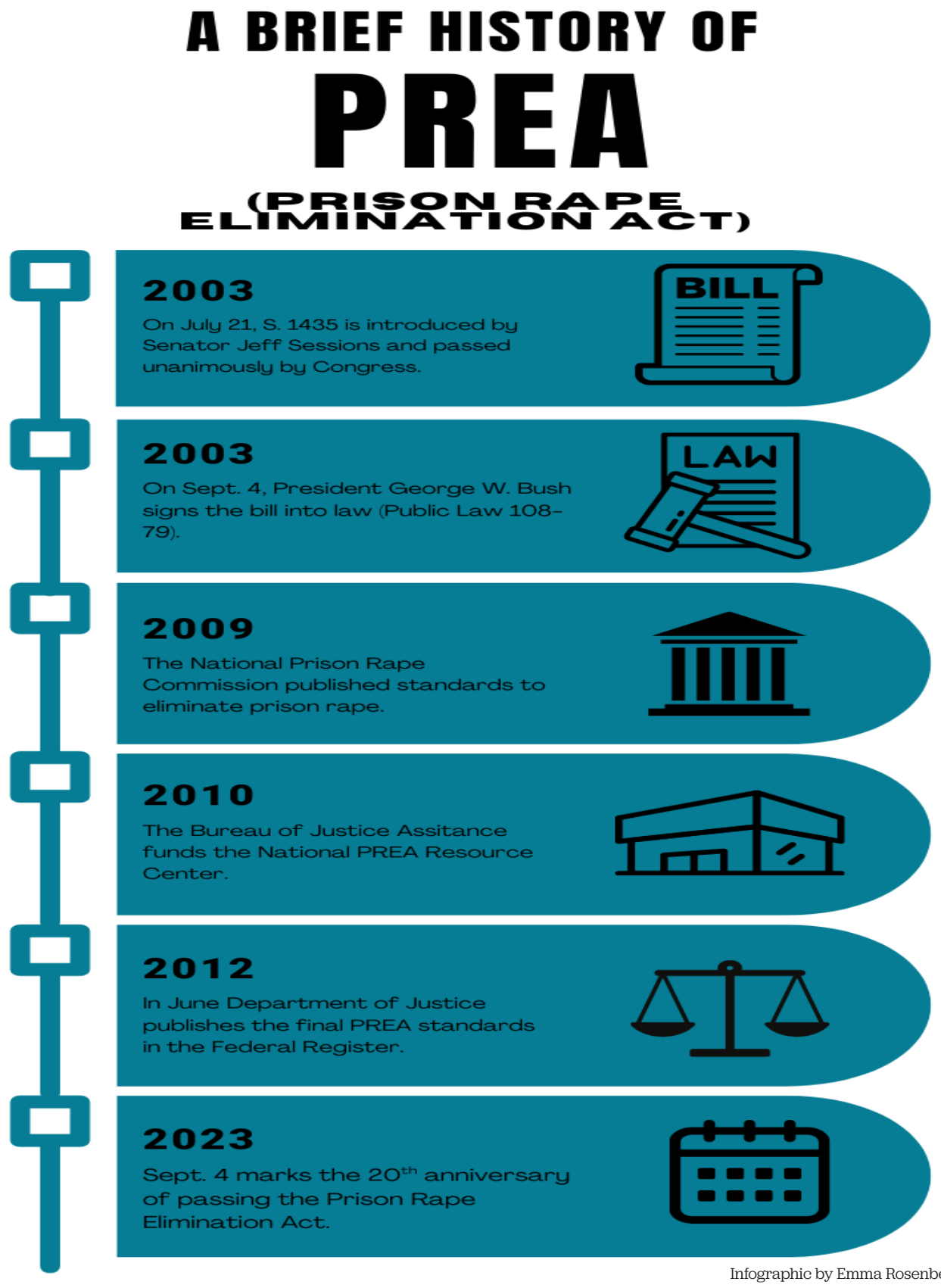
We acknowledge the sexual assault working group that was commissioned by the California Senate and facilitated by multiple prisoners' rights groups, and the report it generated to propose solutions about how to deal with sexual abuse in California prisons.

One push from the outside has been Senate Bill 898, introduced by Sen. Nancy Skinner on June 10, 2024. The bill attempts to codify a mechanism for resentencing incarcerated individuals who have been the victims of staff sexual assault in jail or prison. However, after several amendments by the California legislature, the bill missed the deadline for consideration during the 2024 legislative session. Passing this bill will be a meaningful way for survivors of staff sexual assault to receive some measure of justice.

We await the investigation into CCWF and the California Institution for Women by the United States Department of Justice, announced Sept. 4, 2024, spurred by Rodriguez's case, lawsuits that have been filed, state audits, and advocates' efforts.

And we recognize that, although it must be incredibly difficult for CCWF administration to hear reports of things that have happened over the last 30-plus years, those of us incarcerated at CCWF are empowered to share our stories with anyone brave enough to read them.

For more information about CDCR's internal investigation and actions to prevent sexual misconduct, harassment, and violence online readers can visit: https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/news/2022/12/28/cdcr-refers-internal-investigation-into-former-correctional-officer-to-district-attorney-for-charges-of-sexual-misconduct-of-incarcerated-women/



Infographic by Emma Rosenberg

FEATURES

Compassion in Corrections

Corrections Officer Teresa White is making a difference

By Nora Igova

"Always be humbled and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance because of your love." Ephesians 4:2

In the world of corrections, most think the role of a correctional officer is to strictly enforce the rules and maintain order. However, there are officers who go far beyond their basic duties by embodying compassion, support, and humanity in their daily interactions with their peers and incarcerated individuals.

Teresa White is one of those officers, and her approach to corrections is making a lasting impact on the incarcerated.

White has been working in corrections for 24 years; five years at Salinas Valley State Prison and 19 at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF).

White did not consider the job an option until her baby brother, Roy, was incarcerated. He told her that she would make a great officer because of her fairness and honesty, and she "wouldn't treat the incarcerated like dogs."

White has been living up to her brother's expectations ever since. "Compassion is important in corrections," White said. "It makes us human. We should not be robots working here."

White currently works as the Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment (ISUDT) Division as a Rehabilitative Programs Officer. One of her main tasks is to keep the area secure. White also adds harmony.

Photo by Paper Trail

Teresa White celebrating OMCP graduates achievement.

"Good morning, love," White greeted one of the ISUDT porters, Sholanda Thomas, on a Tuesday in May, as she was passing by.

"She drives me crazy with her music blaring out loud," White said. "I don't want her ears to be affected."

Thomas said that White respects the incarcerated, and she can always count on her being straightforward.

"People tell me what I want to hear to pacify me when I am messing up," Thomas said. "I do not need BS. I need honesty. White gives me that."

"If she sees you stuck at the gate in the heat, she will open it for you," Thomas said. "She would even refill your water bottle when she sees you're thirsty. That is who she is. She cares." White motivates Thomas and, most importantly, "she believes in me," Thomas said.

White said she hopes she makes a difference in the incarcerated population's lives. She prides herself on building them up. "Even when they come cussing me out, when they are having a bad day, I want them to know that I see them. I try to uplift them," White said. "I have my bad days too, but we can do it together. We can uplift each other."

People who inspire White are regular people who have made a significant transformation. One such person is her brother, now a free man.

"He was so down, [but] he was able to rise up and become the brother he was born to be," White said. "If my brother can do it, my girls can too. "

She recently witnessed some of the incarcerated people she works with graduate from California State University, Fresno. Her eyes filled with joy when she talked about resident Eileen Huber.

"She didn't used to believe in herself," White said. "Look at her now, a graduate. I am so proud, like a proud grandma."

Porchia Chisom, a CCWF resident, was recently hospitalized with pneumonia, valley fever, and was septic. She was on a ventilator and in critical condition. Officers would take shifts to observe Chisom for security reasons. Chisom shared how White talked to her, comforted her, and played a movie for her.

> "If it wasn't for Officer White watching over me when I was in intensive care, I don't think I would have made it," Chisom said, tearing up.

"If it wasn't for Officer White watching over me when I was in intensive care, I don't think I would have made it," Chisom said, tearing up. "Her words made me feel that I can make it through. She made me feel like I mattered."

Unlike the stereotypical image of an authoritarian "mind your business" type of officer, White believes in treating every individual with dignity and respect. She understands that many incarcerated individuals come from backgrounds of trauma, hardship, and lack of opportunities.

"White makes sure everyone has a good day," one of her colleagues, Officer R. Ibal, said. "She brings light to her environment." When Ibal was asked to give an example of White's kindness and compassion, she said: "She is the example. She displays kindness and compassion every time you see her."

A supportive officer can provide reassurance and direct residents to resources that promote emotional well-being, according to Lt. Monique Williams, who has also served in the department for 24 years.

"The legacy Officer White is leaving and displays is the type of culture change within CDCR and CCHCS that is needed to bridge the gap between those who work in and live in the institution with kindness, authenticity, autonomy, and grit to do a great job with a beautiful smile sowing seeds of wholeness, joy, and consideration," Williams said.

"CDCR is slowly changing in a positive direction, and I am seeing it at the end of my career," White said. "God says we are all brothers and sisters, no matter where we come from. I am not perfect. No one is, and when we make a mistake, we must move forward and be better."

The advice White wants to give to the young officers is: "Stop, slow down, and start listening. Do not be quick to say no. The population just wants to be heard."

White is planning to retire soon and is excited to be a professional grandma.

We need more officers like White. While discipline and security are crucial in correctional settings, compassion should not be overlooked. Officers like White prove that kindness does not equate to weakness; rather, it is a powerful tool in creating safer and more rehabilitative institutions.

Paper Trail is looking to train more writers for our journalism guild

Interested in joining our team of community-based journalists dedicated to uplifting the voices of the incarcerated? We'd like to invite you to a listening session! You'll learn about our mission and vision, and how we train our writers. If you are interested, please send a form 22 to TV Studio, Building 901, so you can be ducated to attend.

The deadline to submit your form is Sept. 30th.

Help Preserve Our Most Precious Resource

By Melissa Martin

Water conservationists, future generations, and the current population need us to be aware of how much clean drinking water we might be overusing.

I say "overusing" rather than "wasting" because you might be thinking something like, "If I'm actually using the water, how can I be wasting it?"

But the truth is, a lot of us, including myself, do overuse water when we don't know how much goes down the drain.

I've heard things like, "The water is free," but unfortunately, this isn't true for multiple reasons. Here is one of the wide-reaching ones: it's not free to the planet or to the living creatures on it.

According to UNICEF, 703 million people – 1 in 11 people worldwide – lack access to clean water. This is alarming, partly due to the rapid annual decline of natural freshwater resources.

And although you may be asking, "What about when it rains?" unfortunately, this doesn't mean we have more drinking water. We lose massive amounts of rainwater to evaporation, pollution, and runoff that doesn't make it into reservoirs.

On top of that, CalMatters reported in 2024 that 735,000 Californians still lack access to safe drinking water due to groundwater contamination and failing water systems.

Then there are other issues like drought, climate change, evaporation, mass farming, water privatization worldwide, and a rising population consuming more and more of our depleting water.

In 2014, each American used an average of 82 gallons of water at home every day, according to the United States Geological Survey.

So what can we do to become more water-wise in our day-to-day routines?

The EPA suggests these tips for saving our most precious resource:

When brushing your teeth, turn off the faucet, and you could save eight gallons of water per day.

While shaving or just lathering up in the shower, turn the water off and turn it back on to rinse yourself. This could save more than 10 gallons each day.

If you have a garden, you can save water by using gray water, laundry rinse water collected in a bucket via the washer drain hose and voilà!

Assuming you brush your teeth twice a day and shave five times per week, these tips could save you nearly 5700 gallons each year.

And that's just one person. Imagine a room with six people; that's 34,200 gallons of water saved.

I understand that in such close quarters, multiple showers a day are a must, but by using them wisely, we could help guarantee that our children and grandchildren have clean water in the here and now and in the future to come.

Help our glorious Mother Earth and her inhabitants by combining some of the water-saving tips to protect this precious life-giving resource.

We can survive without a lot of things, but water is not one of them. An article from USGS called Water in the Human Body lists reasons why water is so important:

That's just what it does for our bodies. Imagine what it does for the planet as a whole. I don't know about you, but I'm changing my water habits today.

Infographic by Emma Rosenberg

Felon's Alphabet

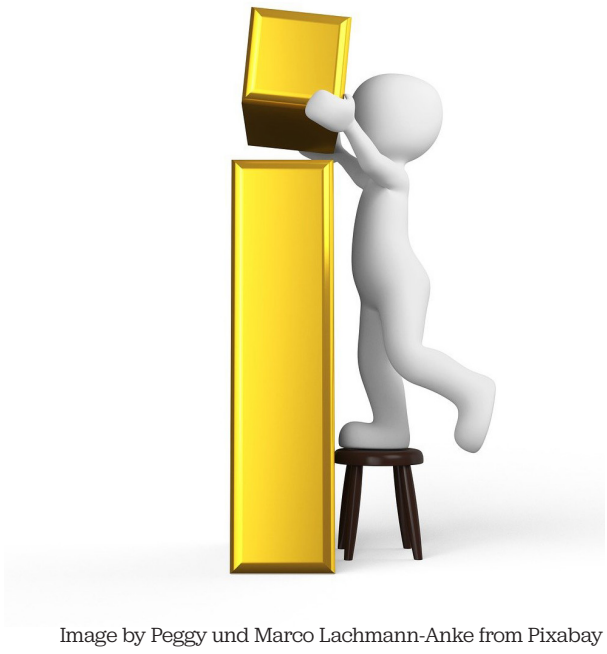


Image by Peggy und Marco Lachmann-Anke from Pixabay

By Sagal Sadiq

Every single justice-involved individual is guilty of not having adequate insight; hence why we are here in prison doing time.

"I" is for insight.

According to Webster's Dictionary, insight is "the ability to see and understand clearly the inner nature of things."

There are five components of insight: remorse, acceptance of responsibility, knowledge of the crime's causative factors, the crime's impact and magnitude, and factually recounting the events of your life crime without minimization.

Remorse involves a deep, long-standing regret for the harms caused. This is the time to demonstrate empathy by "seeing" the crime from the victim's perspective and "feeling" all the ways they have been affected.

If the victim was shot, what did they think when the bullet struck them? How much pain did they feel as they lay there bleeding?

What were their last thoughts? How much did they suffer? It is not enough to simply know the harm you caused. Remorse requires you to feel their pain. By answering these questions, you will experience empathy because you are able to put yourself in your victim's shoes.

Having insight into your responsibility is knowing every way, and to what degree, you were involved: before, during, and after the crime. This needs to include all the gory details, every decision you made on the day of your crime, including the act itself, and any attempt you made to cover it up. Basically, you are required to "put all your criminal cards on the table" and hold nothing back.

Knowledge of your causative factors is the third component of insight. Causative factors are any and all factors in a person's life that contributed to the crime. Do you have a propensity towards poor, destructive choices? Are you a person who ruminates and stays in negative emotional states? Do you engage in antisocial and criminal behaviors? Do you harbor faulty belief systems?

The list of potential factors can appear never-ending: traumas, issues with anger, impulsivity, low self-esteem, substance abuse, mental health disorders, and criminal thinking.

All factors, both internal and external, need to be addressed. You also need to understand how they developed, how they contributed to the commitment offense.

Understanding the impact and magnitude of your crime is recognizing that a crime never has just one victim. Your victims can be your direct victim, but also indirect victims such as the victim's family, extended family members, friends, acquaintances, first responders, the judicial system members, neighbors, and eyewitnesses. This list could even include your family, and any person your life has ever touched.

It is vital that we verbalize all the ways our actions have impacted our victims, mentally, financially, emotionally, and spiritually. It is just as imperative that we speak to the loss of their sense of safety, their loss of faith in humanity, and the total change in their belief systems, personalities, and perspectives, all without minimization.

The impact of violent crime is devastating, and the long-term effects are immeasurable. This crime will affect them for the rest of their lives.

The last component of insight is elocution: articulating all aspects of the crime without minimization.

Always remember that Insight isn't just a BPH requirement; it is required of us as human beings. After all, how sentient are we with zero insight?

FEATURES

The Long Journey Home

Nathan Osborn reflects on 44 years inside the walls

Osborn standing in the Facility C garden.

"Everything worthwhile in life needs work. Gardening, a healthy relationship, and earning my freedom all need watering, care and attention," said Osborn.

Photo by Paper Trail

By Tien H. Mo

Meet Nathan Hunter Osborn, the longest-incarcerated person in Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). Osborn is 65-years-old and a well-built transgender man with a neatly trimmed goatee. He exudes a quiet confidence as he takes a seat for our interview in 512's dayroom. His muscular frame disguises the fact that Osborn has been incarcerated for the last 44 years. He is close to tripling his 15 to life sentence.

Osborn was arrested in 1981, the year I was born, the year CD players were first introduced to the world and the year MTV revolutionized music and pop culture. He was sentenced to 15 to life, has been to board 11 times, and flipped the tables on the board commissioners once. Yes, he literally turned the tables over in the Board of Parole Hearings room.

He took a circuitous route up and down all the level IV women's prisons in California. He began his time in the California Institute for Women (CCWF was not built then) and spent 14 years in Southern California. In 1995, he made his way to CCWF, then went across the street to Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) for a Segregated Housing Unit term. Finally, in 2012, when VSPW became a men's prison, Osborn returned to CCWF. His journey across California prisons was fraught with 98 disciplinary write ups, fights and trouble.

"In the beginning of my time, it was a struggle. In the 1980s, we were told we were never going home and that killed all of my hopes and dreams," said Osborn. His goals in prison became being a thug and using all criminal thinking one can muster up. He filled his days embracing the stereotypical convict lifestyle and wreaking havoc.

This all changed in 2017. "A woman changed my life," Osborn beamed as he described his turning point. Osborn met a girl, fell in love, and began to love himself. They were two broken people when they began their time, but wanted better for one another. They remain together and are still very much in love.

Osborn freed himself, but that was just a start. Years of bad behavior cannot be rectified in mere months. He began attaching himself to positive people, set small goals for himself, enrolled in the Medically Assisted Therapy program and started his healing process.

Kaylee Weisenberg, an incarcerated individual and a friend and mentor to Osborn said, "There are very few people I have met and wanted to see go home more than I want for myself. Osborn has been in prison longer than I have been alive. I have known him for many years and have watched him transform into an amazing man. I will never forget his raw emotions as we had our first conversation about healing, life and freedom. I can't wait to see what he will do with his opportunity. He is an inspiration to so many."

Yes, he backslid, he fell down, but he also got up, dusted off his knees, and started again. "I had to surrender," said Osborn.

Today, Osborn resides in 512, is an integral part of the Insight Garden and is getting ready for the world beyond these gates. You can find him gardening and beautifying the yard for all of C yard to enjoy. He ties gardening, falling in love, and earning his freedom together.

"Everything worthwhile in life needs work. Gardening, a healthy relationship, and earning my freedom all need watering, care and attention," said Osborn. Whether it is 60º or 100ºF, Osborn is unfailingly digging and planting in his white tank and blue jeans.

Osborn plans on attending a truck driver program to expand his job opportunities. He wants to be a truck driver, where solitude and hard work are essential. "Like gardening, this will give me the opportunity to reflect on where I was, where I am now, and where I want to go," said Osborn with a huge grin on his face.

When asked for advice to young lifers, Osborn replied ruefully, "Your greatest failure is the beginning of something amazing. Never give up on your hopes and dreams." He lives by this motto and hopes to encourage those deemed as failures. With his story of inspiration and hard work, anything is possible.

He was at rock bottom, but he used each stone that was blocking his path as a stepping stone to success. At the end of the pile, he found he was the biggest boulder of all, and when he got out of his own way, the sky was the limit for Osborn.

Osborn went to board on April 4, 2025 and was found suitable for parole. The longest prison sentence served at CCWF is coming to an end.

Osborn is both nervous and excited to leave prison after 44 years. Technology is a hurdle he is anxious to tackle. Pagers were in when Osborn was out. Driverless cars and facial recognition were seen on "The Jetsons," not on the streets of San Francisco. These are new and fascinating technology Osborn will see for the first time, and for the first time, our longest incarcerated resident at CCWF will see the outside world.

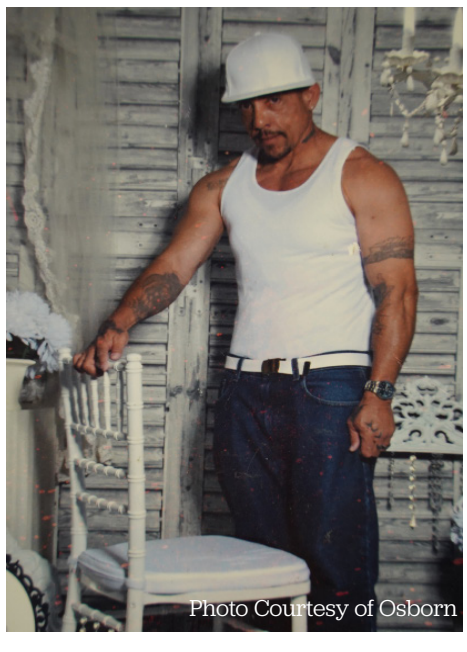


Photo Courtesy of Osborn

Photo Courtesy of Osborn

Photo by Paper Trail

Left: Nathan Osborn in his younger days, Center: With Stephanie Ogilvie, Right: Sharing a laugh with Kaylee Weisenberg