

Hard Climb Journal

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Fathers Behind Bars

By: Christopher Corbit
Hard Climb Journalism Society
Writer

In 2004 it was estimated that 1.5 to 2 million children were affected by parental incarceration. The Child Welfare League published these numbers.

The increase of children affected in the past two decades was 3.8% or roughly 570,000 children annually. The most common age groups affected resulting from parental incarceration are between the ages of five to fifteen and have developed depression, difficulty forming attachments, aggression, and delinquent activity. These negative effects without intervention perpetuate a generational cycle of incarceration.

In an article published by Cambridge University Press, during a ten-year study of 4,327 families, children who experienced parental incarceration at the age of five showed greater depressive symptoms than at age nine resulting in more rule breaking behavior at age fifteen. The study also found that parental incarceration among in this demographic predicted future rule breaking would be more severe than any other form of parental absence.

After viewing the effects parental incarceration has had on children, fathers in custody reading this article might want to consider the effects their absence has had on their children.

Effective interventions can aid in the development of children. In most institutional settings fathers are limited in the ways they can connect with their children. Here are a few examples of ways to connect even while incarcerated which can be done at various institutional levels:

- Handwritten letters are instrumental in showing affection and conveying messages when phone calls are not an option. One way to personalize a simple letter is to use different color pens when writing and try to use your child's favorite color. Another way is to add some doodling in the margins like stars, rocket ships, flowers, or hearts.

- You can also connect with your child by sending cards on birthdays, holidays, or on any occasion. A simple thinking of you card will suffice. Cards can also be used to praise your children for milestone achievements such as graduations or good grades. These forms of praise can serve as positive affirmations motivating them to do well.

- Drawings are another sentiment that can be important when connecting with your children. You can color half of a page from a coloring book and prompt your child to finish the other half.



Photo By Ricardo Gutierrez

CCI Resident looking at family photos

- Writing stories make your communication all the more special. Writing in segments, leaving a "to be continued" at the end of each story will build anticipation for the next letter. If using the phone is readily available stories can be a conversation piece by asking your child what they think might happen next.

- Telephone calls are a good way to ask questions and practice listening.

- Lastly using photo ducats to send pictures and doing home-

work together are a few other simple ideas.

The point is to create a meaningful bond so be creative. If you currently have no contact with your children or would like to find out about your parental rights go to your law library and ask for the family law coordinator in your child's county of residence. If you have an existing child custody agreement check with the court that ruled in the decision, this will likely be the jurisdictional court in charge of your case. []

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Tehachapi's Garden

COMMUNITY

BY: Nathan Sessing
HCJ Staff Writer

A Gardening program is developing on Facility C. The program officially launched in 2022, providing another rehabilitative opportunity for the residents of Tehachapi.

Incarcerated individuals admit to being surprised by the change that has taken place. "The idea is to bring life where there was no life before," said resident Jose Rivera.

River rocks are neatly arranged to highlight the succulents and flowers that were planted. The aromatic scent of tomatoes, flowers, and freshly turned soil drift from the greenery creating a pleasant atmosphere.

It started with a small plot in front of visiting initially using seeds donated by staff. Scraps

from the kitchen were used for compost. Facility C residents contributed to the garden, creating a sense of community and connection.

"We took care of the garden and it was amazing how things grew. We were able to share with the community and when we saw the reaction of the guys who grew the vegetables, it was an amazing blessing," said Juan Gaurdado.

The plan was to give food to the homeless in the community at first, but there wasn't enough to give out. It became clear that it needed to expand. It was suggested that the space inside the fence separating the yard from the patio could hold a bigger garden. The incarcerated and staff came together to provide what was needed. Over \$4000 was donated for the garden program. The community contributed seeds;



Photo By: J. Stoner

Facility C's Captain Skaggs and Garden Crew

Carpentry and Plant Operations provided labor to help construct raised beds, fences, and an irrigation system.

Volunteers received nothing but the satisfaction from their work. Knowing that the transformation has been powerful and impactful. In early June the garden produced its first harvest.

Boxes of radishes, green onions, and spinach were sent to The Salvation Army of Tehachapi.

"We were all amazed, knowing that we didn't grow it for ourselves, we grew it for someone in need," said Jose Rivera. "It felt great for once in my life to not be selfish. I had worked for hundreds of hours and I was able

to donate to someone who needed it."

The next harvest is already on the way with continued plans to donate to those who need it most. Gardening classes will be held among the serenity of nature that the garden provides as this program moves forward. It has been a fruitful harvest; one that the residents of C yard will carry in their hearts forever. []

"We took care of the garden and it was amazing how things grew."

"The Hard Climb journal is committed to equality, innovation, and social justice embracing the ideas and practices of others"

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Substance Abuse Disorders

WELLNESS

Rudy Negrete
HCJ Staff Writer

Drugs.

As new ways to create drugs arise more customers willing to try them but substance use disorder treatments remain the same. Synthetic drugs such as Bath Salts, Spice, Fentanyl, and Wax have long replaced substance use using trends. The days of experimenting with drugs like alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana are much different and have turned into immediate addiction in order to relieve pain, replace boredom, or for self-medication.

In the experimentation phase the user receives the desired effects such as "zoning out" and an altered consciousness, though some people's first experience may include minor side effects. This can further solidify denial and enhance their desire for deeper exploration. This self-permission gives people the ability to use with increased exposure and give new opportunity for trying more complex substances. Over time with prolonged use people become dependent requiring higher doses of the same drug because their tolerance level has risen. The compulsive drug seeking behavior and use despite harmful consequences is known as substance use disorder, or better known as addiction.

According to the California Health Care Foundation, fifteen percent of adults will have a substance use disorder in their lifetime. One of the fastest growing drug problems in the United States is K2, better known as "Spice". This psychoactive substance is sold over the counter at most liquor stores. This

synthetic cannabinoid is falsely mislabeled as Potpourri to bypass the Federal Drug Administration guidelines and is claimed to be a safe alternative to marijuana.

"For decades lions tale (LE-ONOTIS LEONURUS) is known as wild daggha has been smoked in South Africa as marijuana is smoked in the United States. Lions Tale has become more available in Europe and America as an herbal product or a constituent of the herbal incense blend 'Spice', (Physical and Mental Effects of Psychoactive Drugs, CSN production Inc. 2014)

It is added to a drug-laced paper where it is then smoked. It

and emotional issues, as well as serious legal problems.

"Drugs not only ruined my life but the life of others around me, they helped me lie to myself and eventually become my greatest contributing factor to a life without the possibility of parole." said Nemo H. CCI resident

As many people are able to abstain from using substances or alcohol they will begin using the term "I'm in Recovery". For those attending rehab or groups this term is often used for people who wish to be free from addiction but the term sobriety and recovery are confusing, as the terms do not mean the same thing. In

keep commitments. These people are at a high risk for relapse because they have not made the connection to the fundamental changes needed in their lives. This is the difference between sobriety and recovery.

"In my addiction life was about taking what I could get. Recovery is about giving back. Using drugs led me to recovery and gave me what I have to give, hope." stated Mike Peters, a person in long-term recovery.

Recovery requires consistency and an effort to work through all of the issues that led up to substance abuse. People in recovery face fear head on and learn quickly that substances are not their problem. Instead they are aware that the symptoms such as substance use are not the root of their issues. Recovery allows people to make positive changes and reflect with others on thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors.

Commitment to recovery gives those who try it a chance at maintaining long-term sobriety and the opportunity to live a more productive life. Making the transition takes courage, honesty, will power, integrity, dedication, and action. The process to healing is rarely done alone. Those who have accomplished this began with 12 steps groups, self-help groups, and religious services, attending ISUDT, reaching out to health professionals, and maintaining physical activity. Sobriety is the beginning of a life long journey of recovery. []

"Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life."
-J.K. Rowling

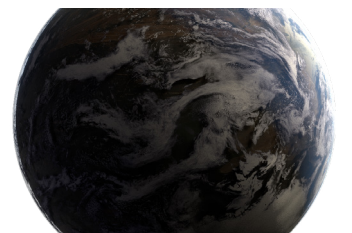
is sold in liquid form for vaping purposes. This makes it easy and nearly undetectable for the transportation into restricted areas. Side effects include rapid heartbeat, anxiety, hallucinations, confusion or aggression according to the National Institute for Drug Abuse.

The California Health Care foundation reports approximately three and half million Californians (14.5%) ages twelve and older have had a substance abuse disorder as of 2022.

Substance use affects a person's brain chemistry that can last hours, days, or in some cases, a lifetime. This can also cause instability, social and interpersonal problems, financial, mental,

fact many people do not realize that there is a distinct difference between the two.

A person in sobriety has eliminated alcohol and drug use from their life. No longer under the influence of any substances however this does not mean that other unhealthy aspects of their life has changed. As an example, a sober person may have poor or damaged relationships, behavioral, and health issues that have not been addressed. In twelve steps groups this is called a dry drunk referring to a person who simply stopped drinking. On the other hand the person may continue to exhibit destructive behavior such as being dishonest, blaming, justifying, or failing to



Editor-in-Chief
Roland C. Cardiel

EDITORIAL

By: Roland C. Cardiel
Editor-in-Chief

Tehachapi has been the unspoken place the "problem children" live but that is beginning to change.

California Correctional Institution has been in use for close to 100 years and has seen high levels of violence and mayhem. It was at one time a Segregated Housing Unit for some of the states most notoriously violent offenders. But CCI's administration is making efforts to change that stigma.

The transformation is not going to happen over night and has seen its share of setbacks. The Spice epidemic that has infested

CDCR has by no means bypassed us and yet we forge on to create a pro-social environment.

The effort of the community here at CCI to make this prison a desirable place to be for the incarcerated has not gone unnoticed by administration. From the top down changes are being made to innovate programing for each facility.

The desire of many residents here is to be able to go to school, programs, and enjoy their downtime. The disruption of this can be attributed to several different factors such as medical codes related to spice overdoses and random altercations among the few cells of individuals that choose to not program in a pro-social manor.

The resilience of the community is no less than relentless and I for one applaud them for it. Problems come and go but it's up to us to make the difference. I've seen officers beginning to buy in on the new way of doing things.

The majority of officers on Facility A seemed to really welcome the change from a level four to a level three. They have been welcoming for the community events that have taken place here

such as KIROS, the ARC Ball out, and several sporting tournaments.

CCI has also seen the emergence of inter-facility sporting events between A and C yards. Talks have been made of even having a board games contest between the incarcerated and custody.

Even though a negative stigma may surround CCI. When its community comes together to make changes, transformation happens.



To Bead Or Not To Bead

BY: Ivan Morales
HCJ Journalist Society Writer

The Hard Climb Journal sat down with Joseph Bigger a Facility A resident at the California Correctional Institution to discuss how he has taken up beading as his source of therapy.

“Beadwork has given me something tranquil in my life, it was therapy for me when I started, whenever I was upset or in a bad mood it would help me out,”

Beading for Joseph has always been a part of his life and also a part of his culture. He is a part of the Choctaw Nation and his mother introduced him to beading at a very young age. It has been a source of closeness for him.

“I feel closer to my heritage... beading has strengthened my knowledge of where I come from” said Bigger.

Although he had stopped beading for thirty years, he has since restarted beading when he arrived at Facility C, due to his friend Freddy’s influence.

Freddy would play a pivotal

role for Joseph helping him hone his skills and craft in the art of beading. Freddy would require him to pass down this skill to two other people. He would soon discover that the reason why Freddy would want him to pay it forward was to be a living amends. Throughout the years of his beading career he would instruct others to bead creating bracelets, necklaces, and toy animals for their families.

A saying often used is “you reap what you sow”. Bigger has been sowing positivity into the community and he has reaped a deeper connection with his family and friends.

“If I can teach someone something that is therapeutic for them, that will keep them mentally stable, then I have done something positive for the community,” said Bigger.

He expresses that he will not stop in his determination to be a living amends and a source of positivity on Facility A. As far as the residents at CCI are concerned, Joseph Bigger is simply known as the “Bead Master”. □



Joseph Bigger with his wonderful creations

Photo By: C. Chambers



Photo By: C. Chambers



Photo By: C. Chambers

My Educational Experience

OPINION

By: Matthew Maga
Facility A Resident

College has been a major causative factor in my recovery. My first class began at High Desert State Prison in 2021, and then I requested a transfer to CCI in 2022. It took me a year to get into college here at CCI.

I was presented with an opportunity to work as a college coordinator with Mr. “J” on Facility C. During that time we signed up 52 new students in one semester. I felt immense pride in being a part of that process. I admit it is not all candy canes and chocolate. Sometimes frustration occurs when encountering hurdles. On the surface these challenges can be very frustrating. However as I got my legs under me I began to work more closely with Mr. J seeing things from his perspective.

I have to admit it was eye opening and as I learned, I also had an epiphany. Some individuals can be very difficult and struggle to be considerate of what someone else may be going through. I thought of these hurdles and realized that they serve a purpose.

First, they teach patience. Second, they filter out the disingenuous. In any case they are there to make sure that only a truly determined person can become a college student.

I have seen men who didn’t believe they could do a college

“I’ve been witness to something I thought I would never see while incarcerated... hope.”



class excel in them. I’ve watched the most hard core gang members who lacked any real positive outlook; grow into a positive influence to other former gang members finding recovery through education. I’ve been a witness to these men gaining self-esteem and confidence. Most of them are straight A students who never knew success in an academic setting. This shows me that there is hope for others and myself outside of addiction and criminality.

These accomplishments would be nice to celebrate sometime in



Mr. Maga hard at work

Photo By Roland C. Cardiel

the future. We would like to see these men and education personnel publicly affirmed. I participated in the 2024 college and GED graduation on Facility C, it was a positive thing to behold. I was struck by how much of a milestone it really was for me. This is the power of recovery through education.

Another thing that struck me was the joy that family members experienced. Now they can see their son, brother, uncle, or father with pride. Since the relocation from Facility C to Facility A, we have seen real

growth in the continuation of the college program. It has expanded to the point where I see a positive interaction between staff and the incarcerated population. As an incarcerated person, I become frustrated that change is not happening fast enough. The truth is programming on Facility A is growing steadily.

I have been able to work in hand with Mr. J and Mrs. Fisher. I also had to learn how to coordinate with correctional staff when signing up my peers for the next semester.

This process has not always

been pleasant but it has always been fulfilling. I hear some residents concerned about having a graduation on Facility A. Their desire is to share their accomplishments with their families. I tell them to be patient and that change takes time. We will have a graduation on Facility A eventually. The biggest take away to focus on is that many are now college graduates, celebration or not, they have accomplished a major milestone. Congratulations class of 2024-2025... You Did It... □

CCI's Bid's Farewell

By Luis Alvarez
HCJ Staff Writer

Residents Bid Farewell to Zack Scow of Marley's Mutts.

A legend leaves a legacy in Tehachapi after what started as a vision of hope. On June 16th, 2025 Zack Scow founder of the Marley's Mutts Program took his last walk around the Marley's Mutts Ranch based in Tehachapi California. The morning air felt thick and filled with emotion his heart filled with uncertainty for the future. One can imagine as he walked through the property that memories of the past sixteen years would wash over him like a tidal wave. The ranch was built on hope, compassion, and self-sacrifice. It offered a space for his vision to take root, the vision of the unbreakable bond between people and dogs. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Zack's personal story doctors had diagnosed him with late stage liver failure and did not know if he would live to see his vision flourish. However Marley his miracle dog is whom he credits for coming out of the abyss of his alcoholism. His loving father would also become a pillar as he showed him unconditional love and support. In time, Zack would begin his personal journey of self-reflection, and healing while pursuing recovery and his potential. His girls would come later as a beautiful gift from his lord and savior. These angels that would ultimately teach him the definition what true love looks like.

Zach's vision for the Marley's Mutts program included teaching the incarcerated population how to train each dog with evidence based, positive reinforcement techniques grounded in behavioral science. The 14-week training program would allow each participant to earn a certificate of completion and learn to develop important social skills along the way. Residents, who are afforded the opportunity to reintegrate into the free society return to their families with a marketable skill allowing them to continue K-9 training. In the 16 years that Marley's Mutts has been operating hundreds if not thousands of dogs have been rescued and placed in a forever home. Some of these dogs went on to become service dogs as others went on to become loving companions. Within the incarcerated population Zach has helped men find their purpose, build their self-esteem, and has witnessed countless personal transformations. Zach accredits his volunteers; adopters, donors, and staff members for believing and helping him build his mission. It started as an idea and took shape during his darkest moments. What sets Zach apart has been the priority he placed on relationships with the incarcerated population. He greets people with a welcoming handshake a simple smile showing the same friendliness and respect he demonstrates to his Marley's Mutts participants. There is no doubt that Zach is aware of the raw potential within the incarcerated community. Men seeking redemption in ways to make amends thereby adding meaning to their lives and hope to the dogs train in the 14-week course.

After hearing the news of Zach's potential departure, I reached out to him and asked if the rumors were true.,

"My heart is inside that prison, along with my purpose. My goal was to create a new novel dog program to service CDCR involving rescue dogs as well as a fostering program. I aimed to create programs around horses as well and offer job placement in the pet industry along with some wrap around services to returning citizens.



Zack Scow

Photo By Woody Rackliffe

My goal was to also seek positive change so that it can be offered in any community that desires it." Zack said

As a M.M. graduate, I would like to share a personal moment that influenced my life and set me on the path to redemption.

Back in April of 2022, I made my commitment to change. What is change to a man trapped in a kid's mentality nearing 50 years of age? By this time I had been in prison for over thirty years and set in my criminal and addictive ways. On this particular day is when I met Zach. I didn't notice him by his laid back personality, but by the black pit-bull he was guiding in our direction. As I walked up and introduced myself I reached out with my hand for a handshake and he quickly pulled me in for a hug!

Yes, that is the Zack I had the privilege of getting to know a humble, down to earth, compassionate and caring man. Someone with a pledge and dedication for greater than most individuals can imagine a person who sees and treats you as his equal; humanity at its core.

There is no doubt that the men that he supported throughout the years will sorely miss Zack. Men he helped get started on the path to recovery by seeing in them what they could not see in themselves. We look forward to a future where his radiant smile will return to assist our population in a different capacity. []

" He had a way of making you feel seen and heard whenever you shared space with him. The way he greeted every person whether you were in the program or not, was humanizing"

-Manny Gonzales



Joe Hurrera, Cory Belcher, And Zack

Photo By Woody Rackliffe



Zack and the 2025 graduates of the Marley's Mutts Program

Photo By Albert Campos



Zack and his Team at the ARC Ball Out Event in 2024

Photo By Woody Rackliffe



Zack Scow and Associate Warden M. Garcia

Photo By Albert Campos



Zack Scow on opening day 2024

Photo By Rick Gutierrez