

The future of corrections is rehabilitation. It's working in this California prison

BY JOHN PURUGGANAN *SPECIAL TO THE SACRAMENTO BEE*

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Citizens of California and the United States at large are losing interest in punishment for punishment's sake. The future of corrections is in rehabilitation, not only in policy with a few window-dressing programs but in practice.

By virtue of visionary leadership within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), the notorious Pelican Bay State Prison is slated to spark a national rehabilitation movement.

This leadership is the primary force behind the transformation of [Pelican Bay's infamous Secure Housing Unit \(SHU\)](#), with innovative programs such as computer coding through [The Last Mile](#), the [Pelican Bay Scholars under College of the Redwoods](#) and the multi-course curriculum of the revolutionizing [Hustle 2.0](#).

This facility boasts on-the-job training and a wide range of self-help classes, anything from theater to anger management. To top it off there are signature Creative Expression courses, which include: the Pelican Bay Arts and Beautification Project that has mural specialists use the prison's walls as their canvas; Music Class with donated guitars; Garden Club, using donated supplies; Beading and Crocheting, where inmates donate their handcrafted items to charities; and the highly-anticipated Insight screenwriters' workshop. All of the Creative Expression courses are inmate-taught.

What could be more fitting and poetic than a prison facility that was condemned for the use of [cruel and unusual punishment](#) – imagine decades of windowless solitary confinement – shifting to now offer hope and humanity [through art](#)?

Research [has shown](#) that rehabilitation through [restorative justice](#), [education](#) and vocation training does work to prevent crime. Yet all too often, with practical conversation that includes all the pertinent facts about criminal justice and prison reform, the discussion is derailed by citing the most heinous prisoners and their crimes.

In the past, this simple tactic has succeeded in blocking valuable information to serve the agenda of special interests. Consequently, necessary facts and statistics needed to determine what is best for society as a whole become lost through political machinations. But citizens are beginning to understand that rehabilitation is not about forgiveness or giving convicted criminals a pass, it is about prioritizing public safety.

In Pelican Bay Facility D's former SHU program, inmates were given one hour per day for "exercise" in a cement enclosure measuring 11 feet 6 inches by 20 feet 6 inches. Unless they had a medical appointment and were being escorted down the corridor by two guards and a gunner walking directly above on the metal mesh catwalk, the inmates were locked in their cells for 23 hours per day.

The point is that these men are seeking to rehabilitate, striving to become the type of person you would prefer being released into your community. The formerly incarcerated should be equipped with alternatives to violence and a criminal lifestyle. It is beneficial to everyone that he or she is released with a higher degree of education and has been trained for one or more vocations, positioned to be a contributing member of society. Finally, the supreme goal is to enable them to reconnect with their humanity and, thereby, gain insight about themselves as a person, a parent, a friend, a spouse and a citizen with a new appreciation for what it means to be free.

Restorative justice simply makes sense. "Tough on crime" only gives you tougher criminals. Rehabilitation is being "smart on crime".

Moving forward, we must also remember the fact that violent crime consistently results in the loss of human life and that victimization does not end there. All of the people related to and otherwise connected with the victim must forever suffer the anguish over the loss of their loved one. The tragic reality of the victim must never be set aside or forgotten.

Prioritizing the safety of society while preserving humanity is essential.

John Purugganan is a published writer and editor who has been in prison in California since 1989.