

Virtual Reality Reentry Program

Impact Report:

Solitary Confinement



at
**Corcoran
State
Prison**

Content Warning:

While we understand the photos may be shocking to some, to our inside partners, this is often the closest they've come to freedom for years. Where we see cages, they see hope, which says a lot about the trauma they are living with and reminds us that punishment never makes us safer

Solitary Housing Unit, aka the SHU

What is the SHU?

Solitary confinement is the practice of isolating people in closed cells for 22-24 hours a day, virtually free of human contact, for periods of time ranging from days up to 2 years. Whilst that may seem shocking, 2 years is a new maximum. Until 2015, people could be, and were, locked in the SHU indefinitely, sometimes for 20-30 YEARS.

Who Is sent to the SHU?

Statistics show there are a range of reasons people have been sent to the SHU, including:

- Contraband possession
- Testing positive for drug use
- Reporting abuse by CO's
- Using profanity
- Not taking orders
- Separation from General Population due to:
 - Gang affiliation
 - Untreated mental illness
 - Sexuality / Gender Identity
 - Religious affiliation

Conditions of Solitary

- 6x9 or 8x20 Individual cell
- 22-23 hrs of Isolation per day w/ 1 hr of confined exercise per day
- Infrequent phone calls and rare non-contact family visits
- Limited access to healthcare, reading materials, personal property, rehabilitative or educational programming
- The conditions can be dire, including power outages, even during extreme heat or cold, pipes dripping, infestations, and more

The SHU, Contd.

Psychological Effects of the SHU

- The stress of the SHU can cause permanent changes to people's brains + personalities
- The risk of premature death or suicide is almost 2x higher for those who spent time in the SHU
- "Social Pain" : feelings of pain that come from negative social experiences like social deprivation, exclusion etc.
- Long-lasting Issues with authority

Common long-term effects:

- Progressive inability to tolerate ordinary things
- Hallucinations and illusions; severe panic attacks
- Difficulties with thinking, concentration and memory
- Obsessive, sometimes harmful, persistent thoughts
- Paranoia, problems with impulse control and delirium
- Self-Isolation and addiction to prescription drugs

The Fiscal Cost of the SHU

- An average of 4,000 individuals in CA are In Solitary
- CDCR says holding someone in the SHU costs at least 18% more than general population
- The current annual cost per individual in CDCR custody is \$106,131, according to the LAO
- It costs at least \$125,234 to hold someone annually in solitary confinement
 - The extra Security required is a high cost that could be used elsewhere

Our Virtual Reality Reentry Program



- To build long-term rehabilitation experiences for returning citizens throughout our prison systems, effectively helping to reduce recidivism & create safer communities.

- To establish VR as a vocational learning program inside institutions.
- To help to strengthen skills & tools for those who are transitioning from solitary confinement to larger general population yards.

Why Virtual Reality?

Our VR Sessions are designed to expose our participants to experiences which have been shown to cause anxiety in individuals reentering society after long term incarceration.



We created a curriculum to address these issues which combines a validated arts-based program and VR, a technology that has been used already to create breakthrough treatments for PTSD.

Virtual Reality in the SHU

This year our groundbreaking VR program was the first program to ever be invited to work with people in solitary confinement at Corcoran State Prison.

These participants experience a higher level of trauma than anyone we have worked with before, and we are so grateful we could facilitate a space for joy, creativity and community, in spite of their usually isolated and punishing circumstances.

We worked with 8 amazing participants both indoors and outdoors at the prison, and our Team of Teaching Artists was comprised of 3 returned citizens and one Creative Acts staff member.



In the above image our participants are doing an exercise Snapshots where they are asked to act out an action (eg you're in a boxing match!) and then freeze in motion.

In Our Partners Words



"I really think about life now for the first time."

-Participant

**"It's a blessing
just to feel."**

-Participant



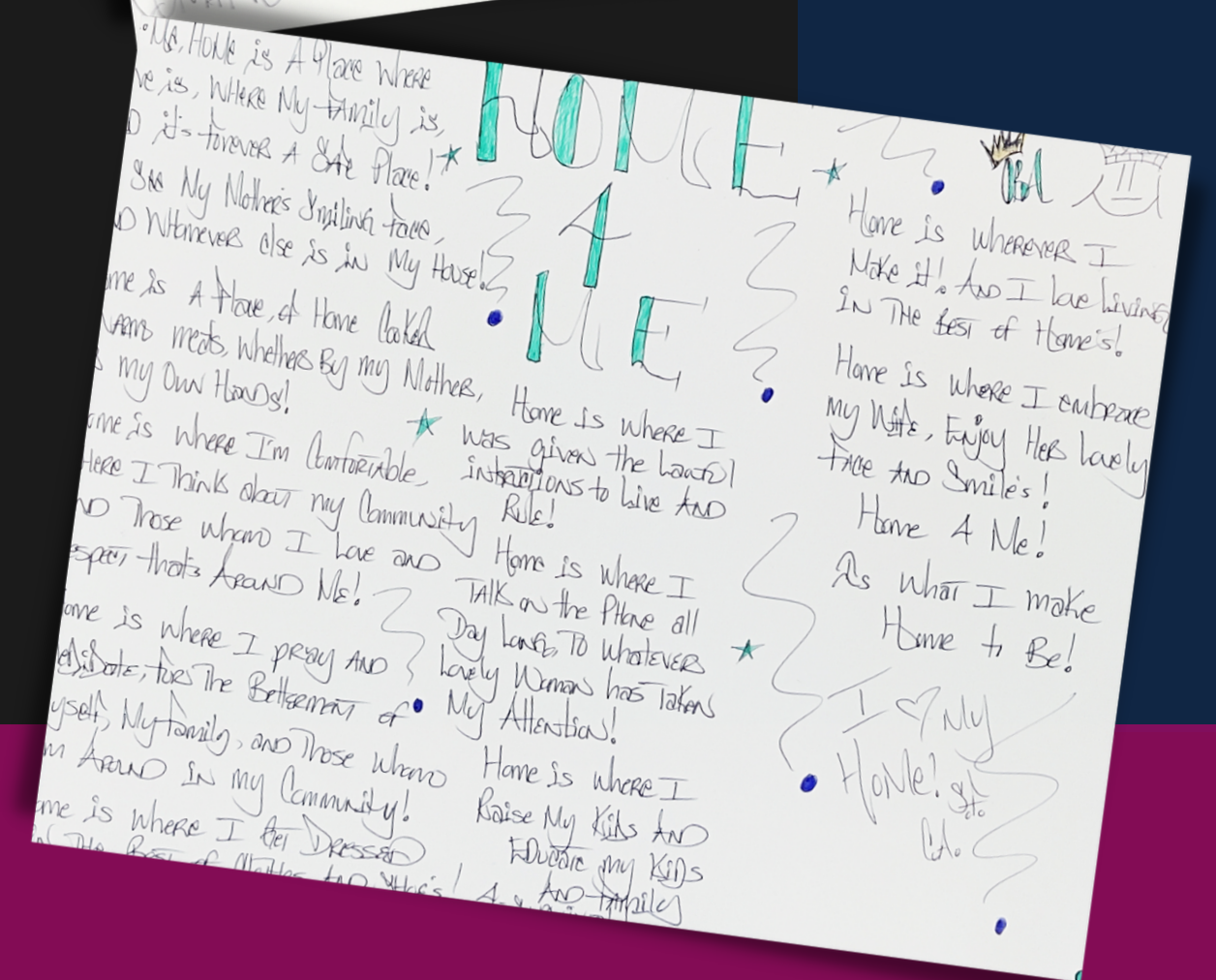
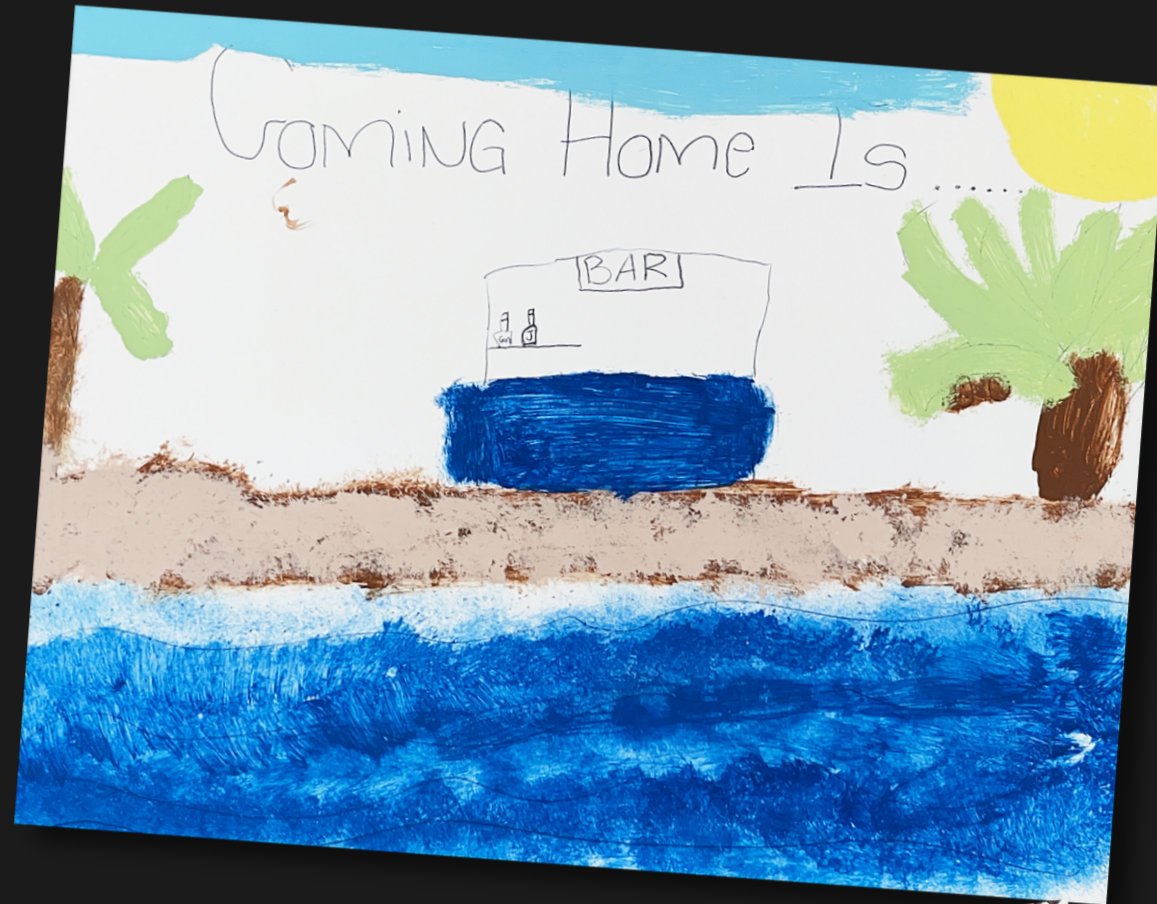
"I felt free...I'm flying with the stars!"

-Participant

"I have hope, I have vision now..."

-Participant

Our Partners Artwork



A Call to Action

Now You Know:

The background and details of the SHU. We hope the information we have shared sheds light on the inhumane conditions of prisons, in general, but in particular the experience of solitary confinement — emotionally, physically and long-term. The SHU only makes a person's condition worse, and it harder to re-enter society.



What You Can do:

- Continue to educate those around you on the conditions of the SHU and its detrimental effects
- Get involved with groups working to end Solitary Confinement in your area
- [Donate](#) to Creative Acts OR other orgs that are doing work to end the SHU



Resources

To learn more about Solitary Confinement:

- ["A veto for the 'Mandela' bill that sought to limit solitary confinement in California"](#)
 - *Via Cal Matters*
- ["Key Reforms to California's Use of Solitary Confinement"](#)
 - *Via Center for Constitutional Rights*
- ["2021 Annual Report on Suicides in the CDCR"](#)
 - *Via California Health Services*
- ["New data: Solitary confinement increases risk of premature death after release"](#)
 - *Via Prison Policy Initiative*
- ["Health and Solitary Confinement: Issues and Impact"](#)
 - *Via Psychiatric Times*
- ["Nearly 50,000 people held in solitary confinement in US, report says"](#)
 - *Via The Guardian*

Orgs to Follow and Support:

[Solitary Watch](#)

[Unlock The Box](#)

[The Marshall Project](#)

[ACLU: Stop Solitary](#)

[Photo Requests from Solitary](#)

[Solitary Confinement \(.org\)](#)

[Berkeley Underground Scholars](#)

Thank You to our Funders



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