



Community Resource Manager's Office Technician A. Torres gets things done when it comes to launching events at the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center

Photos by Aristeo Sampallo // SQNews

Humans of San Quentin holds recognition ceremony

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Humans of San Quentin hosted nearly 300 residents and guests by acknowledging the stories, insights, and beliefs that residents expressed on HoFSQ digital platforms.

The inaugural ceremony in May recognized the contributions of the incarcerated voices inside San Quentin with certificates, cake, pizza, and a preview of the Humans of San Quentin Tiny Cell sessions.

"HoFSQ has helped with my rehab more than anything. It lets me know that I am still a part of society. They still hear and see me," resident Regal Robinson said.

In 2018, founder Diane Kahn was a teacher inside San Quentin when a story by a resident in her class prompted her to share the stories and voices of incarcerated individuals with the outside world. "It is only because of your trust and vulnerability are we standing

here," Kahn said. "I see the impact of this program and how people see value in themselves when they get to share their stories. That's the reason that I do this," resident and co-founder Juan Haines said. "When people are able to value themselves, it allows them to value others."

A 2022 HoFSQ impact report emphasized how, one letter at a time, the program has supported incarcerated persons in all 50 continental states, South America, and Europe. HoFSQ is featured in over 100 different prisons on social media and has reached out to over 260 prisons in the world.

The report stated the mission of the program is to break down the walls and stereotypes of prison life and humanize incarcerated individuals, while transforming the criminal justice system.

Resident Cesar Nava said the impact from writing for HoFSQ allowed him to view himself as human. "It allowed

me to feel safe; it humanized me. I've always dehumanized myself."

"The impact for me [is] to be able to share my story and to show that change is possible. Not only am I doing the time, but also my wife is doing the time right along with me," resident Tommy Wickerd said.

HoFSQ inside team member Henok Rafael said the program has expanded to an audio avenue. The program is bringing incarcerated individuals, staff, and administration together to produce music in the Humans of San Quentin Tiny Cell sessions.

"It has been really exciting to share my music, and I hope to use this to spark a flame in others to play music," resident Brian Conroy said.

Maddie Herrero, HoFSQ's outreach intern, aids with clerical work and said it was a tour of San Quentin and the stories she heard that inspired her to be involved. She said she noticed that certain individuals are more

susceptible to incarceration and she believed a change was possible.

"Incarceration is a part of our system. If we don't talk about it, we cannot change parts of the system. At HoFSQ we are working for change," Herrero said.

Outside team member Laurel Wilson said she appreciates the opportunities to come into the prison and hear the stories of residents. She said HoFSQ allows outside persons to look beyond the offender's crimes. "The incarcerated individuals are still human beings who have value, interests, and families." She said sharing those voices not only "humanizes" individuals, but also ensures they are not forgotten.

"Humans of San Quentin breaks down stereotypes of what people think about inmates. They allow people to express themselves through either art or music," resident Coby Phillips said.

—Jordan Junious contributed to this story



Founder Diane Kahn and residents from SQ's deaf community sending shout outs.



A quartet of SQ's residents receives certificates of recognition



Off-Duty Correctional Officer I. Hunter raps alongside residents in a sneak preview of a special event in the near future