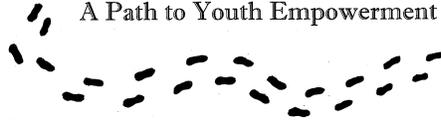


# THE ROAD:

A Path to Youth Empowerment



A NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY  
**THE MEN OF KID C.A.T.**  
 CREATING AWARENESS TOGETHER  
 AT SAN QUENTIN PRISON

## NOWHERE TO LOOK BUT UP

*Malachi is from Los Angeles and has served an adult prison term for second degree murder, which he committed when he was 15 years old. Once he realized the actual harm he caused in so many lives, he proceeded to strive to become a better human being by participating in numerous programs such as Vocational Machining, Narcotics Anonymous, I.M.P.A.C.T. (Incarcerated Men Putting Away Childish Things), Addiction Recovery Counseling, Non-Violent Communication, and Victim Offender Education Group. In June 2013, he graduated with an AA degree from Oakland's Patten University. He has also been published in the New York Times for his essay, "Prison is Too Violent for Youth Offenders." Malachi seeks to encourage and inspire youth to strengthen their communication skills, improve educationally, and avoid crime.*



Kid C.A.T. members

**Q: What is one of your favorite childhood memories?**

A: I remember driving with my family up a huge mountain and as we drove up the road, the mountain was full of snow. My family got out of the car and started playing but I was afraid to get out because there were no protective boundaries on the mountain. My family got me out of the car, walked me to the cliff and as I looked down, I saw clouds. We were so high. It is a memory that I will never forget.

**Q: What are some of the things you enjoyed doing growing up?**

A: I used to like to go to my mom's ex-boyfriend's club, "Something Unique" where I was a back-up D.J. and participated in dances and rapped in talent shows—I made it to the semi-finals.

**Q: What factors pulled you away from making the right decisions for yourself?**

A: I grew up in a home with no family structure. I did not have a father and my mother had abusive boyfriends. For a short time, my mother made my brother and I do Jehovah Witness Bible studies but we did not practice its principles. My mother worked and when she came home she went out a lot.

**Q: How did the abuse affect your behavior?**

A: I was very bitter because my mother let some stranger (her new boyfriend) come into our home and dehumanize us. He abused my mother, the police separated them but she eventually let him back into the house. The bitterness caused me to be disconnected from her and as I got a little older, I left home mentally, emotion-

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# POWER THROUGH EDUCATION

BY MICHAEL TYLER

I would love to say I had a great childhood, but there were drugs and alcohol. I would also love to say that education was always important to me, but it was not.

During my elementary years, school was great and I was a great student. School was a safe place for me. I was student of the month often and I found myself on honor roll. Yet in the midst of me being a great student, things at the house were getting worse and worse and my ability to cope no longer worked. By the time I reached the seventh grade, school wasn't that important. The drugs and alcohol that caused turmoil at home became the focus of my life. I couldn't stay focused. My mother didn't encourage me to go to school because it was good, only because it would affect her if the cops came looking for me. Knowing that turmoil was at home, my mind wasn't in the classroom anymore.

I began to get bad grades and by the ninth grade I began to cut school. The police dragged me to school my sophomore and junior years. At that time school was the least important thing in my life. My biological mother would kick me out of the house whenever she felt like it. When I was younger, I just wanted to go to school, go to football practice, and come home to do my homework. My biological mother had a problem with that and made it evident when I came home. This confused me, and that confusion added to the things keeping me from focusing on school.

I must say that there were teachers around who would have offered educational opportunities if I had reached out to them. However I was too afraid to reach out for any type of help at that time. For me to have said that I

**Roughly 25% of high school students will not graduate, leaving roughly 1 million high school students without a diploma.**

- U.S. Department of Education



Education has taught and is teaching me tools to change not only my life but also the lives of those around me.

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needed help in class or at home—it just wasn't going to come out of my mouth. I found other ways of dealing with the pain of rejection and neglect.

The ways I chose to deal with those feelings were to shut down or run—those were the wrong ways to deal with them. I don't know if they, the teachers or school, just didn't want to reach out to me or if the law wouldn't let them. All I know is that I didn't take the opportunities that were there.

Today, education is very important to me. I've realized that education can help me through my problems or pain. It has opened many doors in my life. I work with at risk youth through the S.Q.U.I.R.E.S. program here at San Quentin. Education has taught and is teaching me tools to change not only my life but also the lives of those around me. Being able to pick up a book and read it—and understand it—has done wonders for my self-esteem. I'm currently pursuing my Bachelor of Specialized Studies at Ohio University. My plan is to work in both business management and psychology. I want to use my education as a tool to give back to my community outside of these walls as well as the community inside the walls. I've also learned that the only way I'm going to keep my knowledge is to give it away. □

# CHRISTMAS CARD DECORATING

BY TOMMY WINFREY

Members of San Quentin's Kid C.A.T group and volunteers gathered on December 8, 2013 to decorate Christmas Cards for youngsters at Oakland Children's Hospital.

For five hours, 16 inmates and 10 outside volunteers wrote inspirational messages and adorned cards with colorful drawings to make the holidays just a little bit better for sick children.

"I do it to bring a smile to a child's face," said Charlie Spence, a member of Kid C.A.T.

Cleo Cloman III, also a member of Kid C.A.T. said, "It took me back to my childhood and my light bright. Coloring the cards was like plugging in all the lights and watching it develop."

The magic of the holiday season was definitely in the air. One of the outside volunteers, Woody said, "I liked connecting with the group because it was a different experience. It felt almost like gathering with friends and family."

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"I did it to bring a smile to a child's face"

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He was not the only one who felt this way, "Decorating the cards was great, and it felt really rewarding to work with the men of Kid C.A.T. for such a positive cause," said outside volunteer Bess.

Hera, an outside volunteer used the love she felt in the room as inspiration for her decorations. "I think the cards we made, each one is unique, and we put a lot of love into them, will be appreciated by the kids," she said.

While others like Nghiep "Ke" Lam, a member of Kid C.A.T. recognized the importance of giving back, Lam said. "I had a wonderful time. It was a chance for me to give back to my community and model restorative practices for others." This is the fourth year the men of Kid C.A.T. have gathered to decorate cards for this

cause, and they plan to keep doing it.

The 200 cards were decorated and will end up in the hands of the youngsters. Projects like the annual Christmas Card Decorating Project keep the men of Kid C.A.T. united in a common cause of helping the youth of today. □



Kid C.A.T. Christmas card decoration project

(continued from cover)

ally, and most of the time physically. I began spending lots of time on the streets.

**Q: What was the difference between staying at home and being in the streets?**

A: I enjoyed hanging out in the streets where I received attention, became popular and developed an identity. Growing up I was not a confident person and I was unsure [of] who I was. By the time I was thirteen, I began smoking and ditching school. In the streets, I began meeting gang members. I started to hang out around them more and more each day and smoked marijuana with them. They were very welcoming. It felt great to feel accepted where I was mentally and emotionally at that time. Joining the gang gave me an identity. Before I became a gang member, I never knew who I was and where I was going in my life. I began to become actively involved in criminal activities. I was respected and started having more money than I ever had through stealing and even drug sales. I spent days away from home. Things progressed and I had to keep up with the image I was portraying by harming others in a variety of ways. I started to minimize and justify my behavior by excuse-making and blaming others in order to push out the feelings of guilt. Family was not that important to me at that time. My gang was. I was very selfish in my thinking. The streets gave me the power that I didn't have at home. I told myself that I will not go through the things that I've been through at home again. I had the power to make choices and do what I wanted to do.

**Q: Do you believe that your lifestyle led you to your incarceration?**

A: Definitely. Once I joined the gang there were certain things that I had to do to keep my image up, living a life of crime.

**Q: What emotions came up for you once you realized the possibility of spending the rest of your life in prison?**

A: I would say this: about two years into my prison term was the last time I cried. My reality set in when I realized that. I was in a level four maximum-security prison that was very dangerous. I felt hopeless, and helpless, that was...the darkest time for me because life was so uncertain.

**Q: When did you find hope?**

A: It came from God. I sort of had some kind of God conscious from the times I studied the bible as a child. Once I was at rock bottom, I had nowhere to look but up.

**Q: How difficult was for you to change the direction of your life in a prison culture known for violence?**

A: One of the challenges was when I thought, "How is life going to be for me when I do change?" I have been in this lifestyle for so long and it was scary for me to think of something different. Once I saw the prison culture for what it really was, I found out that I had a choice. I found out that I wasn't trapped but I was indeed capable of being free. That is when I made a decision to change.

**Q: Was there anyone who inspired you to change?**



Malachi before being found suitable for parole

A: One guy who was really known and influential used to see me go to church, became interested in the Bible. He decided to change his life and it was inspirational to me because of his high status as an ex-gang member. It was as if he was fearless.

**Q: What would you say to a young man who is coming into prison to serve a life term?**

A: I think one of the first formal things to do is to get to know yourself. You have to know yourself so that you can take control of your life, and realize that you're not trapped [into] certain ideologies or cultures, so there is hope, once you get to that point, you have to understand how you got to that point where you're in prison. Why did you do what you did to get in prison and [you have to] recognize the harm you have caused that got you here. Once you [do that], your focus should be on introspection and making amends.

**Q: How are you making amends?**

A: For me making amends is making positive decisions every day. I want to work on myself and make myself better, take responsibility for my actions, and change my life. Only after doing that would I be able to give back to others and offer myself for the positive interest and healing of others.

**Q: Recently you were granted parole. What are your concerns and goals?**

A: I admit that I have had a little fear and uncertainty. Being that I never experienced life as an adult in the free world, there are many things that I'm going to have to become accustomed to. This will be the first time in my life when I will truly be responsible in caring for myself. My goal is to have a successful transition into society, earn a living, volunteer my time working with at-risk youth, and find a good church. I think it is important to keep things simple for a while. □

# UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: RETHINKING OUR JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

By Nghiep Lam

According to the report *Defending Childhood: Protect, Heal, Thrive*, by the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (Task Force), exposure to violence is directly correlated to a child's inability to trust, heightened states of alert, diminished impulse control, isolation, substance abuse, lack of empathy or concern for others, and aggression.

Children in the juvenile justice system are often viewed as beyond hope and uncontrollable, labeled oppositional, willfully irresponsible, or unreachable, according to the Task Force. The status quo of correction for children with behavioral issues is more often than not punishment, rather than assessment, screening, or trauma-informed care.

The juvenile justice system in recent years has made an effort to restructure itself and to improve outcomes for children and their communities. However the Task Force argues that we still must implement models that practices restorative justice and offer training to personnel so that they can handle mental health and substance abuse issues among youth. The Task Force determined that studies have shown that 65 percent of girls and 70 percent of boys in detention facilities have been diagnosed with multiple mental health disorders and nearly a quarter of youth in residential placements have attempted suicide. For many youth, placement in these harsh detention facilities only worsens their

problems, triggering memories of past or recent traumatic events, which can bring upon the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Staff in juvenile justice systems have been known to be unwilling to acknowledge the need for mental health and related services, the Task Force found. An analysis of data from state agencies responsible for overseeing juvenile detention facilities found that between 2004 and 2007 there were approximately 12,000 documented reports of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse by staff members—nearly 10 assaults per day, on average. The actual numbers are likely to be higher than recorded because children are often too afraid to report such abuse.

The studies analyzed by the Task force have shown that there is a profound need for more effective measures of providing rehabilitation to youth who are incarcerated. The Task Force made several recommendations that include upgrading standards in the juvenile justice system: abandon practices that traumatize children; base assessments on each child's needs; address needs of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer) individuals in the juvenile justice system; implement policies that keep children in school; ensure legal representation to accused children; and whenever possible, prosecute children in the juvenile justice system instead of transferring them their cases to adult court.

Across America, violence and the juvenile justice system impacts millions of children's lives. The Task Force recommendations would reduce our nation's budget by hundreds of millions of dollars if implemented on a national scale. In addition, America would no longer be one of the few countries that incarcerated their youth at such an alarming rate. □

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## CHILDHOOD TRAUMA: IMPACT ON SELF AND SOCIETY

By Monique LeSarre, Psy.D.

Childhood trauma impacts people across their lifespans. In the work we are focused on in Kid C.A.T., we are focused on bringing awareness and intervention strategies to youth and their families inside San Quentin and outside in our communities. According to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, violence, crime and abuse impacted 46 million of the 76 million children in the United States in 2012.

Trauma can occur at a number of levels of a person's experience—individual, familial, systemic, and structural. These range from interpersonal and domestic violence to witnessing and experiencing community violence, war, natural disasters and systemic oppression of poverty, immigration, racism, and structural oppressions intrinsic to foster care and juvenile and criminal legal systems.

The consequences of child trauma are a major public health issue worldwide. For millions of children, the unaddressed consequences of trauma will adversely impact their entire lives and the lives of those around them and even the lives of their unborn children.

The impact of trauma can be pervasive—diminished cognitive abilities and school performance as well as interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and feelings of agency and empowerment. If untreated, the trauma can lead to emotional problems manifested in higher rates of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. This can lead to substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and actions, and self-destructive behaviors, including poor decision-making and reckless sexual behaviors.

The financial cost of children's exposure to violence to society is astonishing. As a nation, we spend \$333 billion to \$750 billion annually, or up to 37½ cents of every dollar spent on health care, to address the pervasive consequences of exposure to violence.

Additionally the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study has shown that three or more adverse childhood experiences of trauma can lead to a higher incidence of pre-mature adult mortality from stress-related illnesses—cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, high blood pressure, and strokes.

Kid C.A.T. advocates for appropriate interventions impacting both the individual, familial and systemic and policy levels in order to support and protect our children and communities. □

# KID C.A.T. HYGIENE DRIVE FOR BAY AREA HOMELESS CHILDREN INSPIRED BY MY LATE GRANDMOTHER'S LIFE COUPLED WITH MY BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH HOMELESSNESS

By Michael Nelson

As the holiday season approaches, children around the world are anticipating the arrival of everything they've always dreamed of—the latest game station, iphone, new clothes, a pony, or possibly even a new car. Some may look forward to spending time with family, eating a big meal, or watching a football game. This is a time when children experience tradition, and are exposed to the meaning of holidays for their family. It is a time that allows them to build a lifetime of memories. But some will be lucky if they receive a free meal from a nearby shelter or food kitchen.

California ranks second in the nation, behind Texas, with the number of children considered to be homeless.

The state also ranks 41st among all states for the quality of its child welfare system, according to the ZERO TO THREE policy center, which would come as no surprise to some. It should, however, make one stop and think.

The men of San Quentin's Kid C.A.T. group have done just that.

Based on the group's mission to inspire humanity through education, mentorship, and restorative practices, I have been motivated to act. Inspired by my late grandmother's life and brief encounter with homelessness, I have asked the group to dedicate their time and efforts toward addressing possible solutions on how to combat this unfortunate epidemic plaguing our state. We have dubbed our idea The Hygiene Drive for Bay Area Homeless Children.

The Hygiene Drive for Bay Area Homeless Children is motivated by the group's philosophy that as children we took from our communities; as men, we have a responsibility to give back to the children of our communities. We have made a commitment to making

amends for our past wrongs, and restoring that which we have harmed. The men, along with our community volunteers, have begun strategizing and planning for a long journey of seeking donations for our hygiene drive. Coming up with creative incentives for the San Quentin inmates and community members to donate products, and methods of sustaining the drive for years to come is something Kid C.A.T. strives to do.

Our short term goal: fill 100 bags with products rang-



ing from soap, toothpaste, and shampoo to undergarments, towels, first-aid kits, and nail clippers—by December.

The long-term goal: provide children with hygiene products throughout the year; create awareness and conversation behind the hygiene drive, sparking a ripple effect of donations and social consciousness; inspire change resulting in federally mandated funds and programs that will guarantee homes for homeless children and families.

The Hygiene Drive for Bay Area Homeless Children is a pilot for much larger plans for the future. The California Bay Area is only the beginning. Recognizing the correlation between homelessness, self-worth, self-image, and destructive behavior, the hygiene drive promotes health, support, and prevention, one bag at a time. In the end, the message that Kid C.A.T. hopes to spread is one of valuing the young people who make up our communities. Bags filled with hygiene products send the message that we care and that they are worth caring about. □

## HISTORY OF KID C.A.T.

Kid C.A.T. was founded in 2010 by men meeting on the prison yard and in cells. The members of Kid C.A.T. (Creating Awareness Together) all received life sentences for crimes they committed as youth. They have remarkable stories to tell about hardship, personal growth, education, transformation and giving back to the community. They are men who grew up in prison and as a group have matured into a community that cares for others, is responsible to others and accountable for their own actions. They formed Kid C.A.T. to create safer communities and help youth grow into successful, mature adults through education, mentorship and restorative practices.

### I AM

By Aouxhinh Pangthong

I am outgoing with a little bit of shyness  
I wonder what my path in this life is  
I hear that the grass is greener on the other side of the fences  
I see brighter days only on the backside of my eyelids  
I want the good life but that dream comes in pieces  
I am outgoing with a little bit of shyness

I pretend I'm happy so I smile to mask it  
I feel cheated but, hey, that's the way life is  
I touch the face in the mirror, "Yo, you got this"  
I worry about a lot, fighting to block out the noises  
I cry out for the little kid lost inside me  
I am outgoing with a little bit of shyness

I understand I'm just a man, a human  
I say life is short, get it how you live it  
I dream with my eyes wide open  
I try but I'm barely afloat among the sea of peoples

I hope I never give up, this life is precious  
I am outgoing with a little bit of shyness



Juvenile lifers, San Quentin, meeting about SB 260

## MUSINGS...

As I sit and watch TV, I catch myself daydreaming about what it will be like once released from prison. To tell the truth, I am a bit afraid. Will it be anything like it was seventeen years ago?! I'm from a slow pace town called Los Banos, where I knew the town like the back of my hand. Now there are cell phones, electric cars, and internet-oh my! Being afraid won't hinder me, it's just a feeling that I feel in the moment. I plan to parole to the Bay Area and I'm afraid that I will get lost a few times. Hey, it's just what I'm going through right now.

From Kid C.A.T. member Michael T.

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### Mission Statement

Here at San Quentin State Prison, we have formed a group that we call “Kid C.A.T. (Creating Awareness Together).” A group that is dedicated to raising awareness about youth related issues, as well as restoring the communities that we have caused great harm to, we are all serving life-term prison sentences for crimes that we committed during our youth. While incarcerated, we have come to the understanding that our actions have direct and indirect consequences that last for a lifetime; while we cannot undo the wrongs of our past, we aim to live as examples of the human potential of redemption. Through Kid C.A.T., we participate in many projects that reflect our responsibility not only to do what is right, but also to do what is right by others.

Kid C.A.T. wants to print your thoughts!  
Seeking 350 word or less contributions  
from:

Youth  
Incarcerated youth  
Juvenile lifers  
Educators  
Youth organizations  
Public officials

We reserve permission to edit content.

#### Submissions to:

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“I am truly impressed by the passion and commitment of Kid C.A.T. members in improving the lives of those who have been imprisoned and often forgotten by society. They have created a voice that is resonating beyond the walls of San Quentin and is influencing policy makers, politicians and others who are moved by their stories and ideas for social change.”

- Jeff Adachi, San Francisco Public Defender

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