

FOCUS:

The Impact of Creative Arts in Supporting Successful Reentry Into Society And Alternatives to Incarceration

Through a partnership with organizations that bring the arts into NY State prisons, we'll follow the teaching artists who run the programs and the prisoners who participate.



The Fortune Society
Building People, Not Prisons



FORMAT:

A three-episode “chapter” of the docu-series will dig into prison reform through the arts, tracking three different organizations of varying sizes, methods, and programs.

Each episode will focus on a different incarcerated individual’s journey from before they are introduced to the arts programs, to their introduction to these programs and the start of their participation, to how the programs have changed their perspective and their lives, to finally — for some — their release from prison and re-entry into society as enlightened individuals with a new appreciation for the arts.

WHY:

To raise public awareness of the humanity behind prison walls.

To provide visibility to non-profit organizations doing important work for fellow humans left behind in a broken criminal justice system.

From the website of non-profit organization, Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA): “RTA is often the first step towards development in other areas. The majority of men and women incarcerated in New York State prisons enter the system without a high school or equivalency education. RTA builds skills and confidence that motivate prisoners to give school another try. And as important as job training is, the ability to communicate, set goals, solve problems and work collaboratively is just as critical.

The Obama White House hosted a Criminal Justice Reform, Innovation and the Arts meeting in 2015 at which **Attorney General Loretta Lynch** noted that “...while the importance of job training and educational opportunities for incarcerated people cannot be overstated, **the arts also serve a fundamental need – as a creative outlet and form of self-expression providing opportunities for collaboration and emotional growth.**”



*"I found the **courage** to stop making destructive choices, a **heart** to care about other people, and the **brains** to not only earn a college degree, but to share that knowledge with others. Like Dorothy, I realized that it is within my power to leave here and return **home**."*

~ Inmate at Sing Sing Correctional Facility



www.rta-arts.org

*"Where the prison consensus teaches that hard work is for suckers, the **RTA culture teaches that nothing lasting can be achieved without effort.***

*Where the prison culture preaches every man for himself, RTA stresses that **each member is needed for the group to be whole.***

*Where prison encourages isolation and violent retaliation to offense insures a long life, RTA shows that **communication and cooperation are vital to the health of the community.***

~ RTA member, Woodbourne Correctional Facility

RTA's mission is to use the **transformative power of the arts** to develop social and cognitive skills that prisoners need for successful reintegration into the community. RTA also seeks to raise public awareness of **the humanity behind prison walls.**

RTA is a commitment to a community of peers that uses the arts as a tool to support emotional, social and cognitive growth. Over the years, thousands of community guests have **awakened to the potential of a population** to which they had never given a thought.

As an artistic community in which members participate for years, RTA offers a dynamic and richly varied program. **Each facility in which RTA works has a unique curriculum that reflects the interests of the group**, the energy and ideas of RTA facilitators, and the particular security concerns of prison administration.

Theatre	• RTA's theatre program focuses on collaboration, and includes full-scale & workshop productions, improv, Shakespeare, script analysis, character study, and devised, physical, and forum theatre.
Productions	• Performances include original, classical, and contemporary plays & musicals. Prisoner audiences, many of whom have never seen a play, have an opportunity to connect to the universality of common experience theatre provides. Productions require intense group work toward a common goal; thus, RTA becomes a community microcosm in which to practice responsibility, collaboration, and problem-solving.
Dance	• Dance requires control, focus and memorization. Each individual expresses their own longing, hope, fear and joy, while ensemble dance develops body awareness and non-verbal communication.
Music/Voice	• RTA has ongoing vocal, keyboard, and songwriting workshops, and productions of revues and original musicals created by the inmates.
Writing	• Prisoners have a passion to write and some very complex emotions to express, creating original poetry, narratives, and plays layered with messages and life lessons.
Visual Art	• Participants in RTA's visual art program learn art theory and history, creating landscapes, self-portraits, personal logos, story boards, fashion design, and support RTA's theatrical productions by creating sets, costumes, and props.. Artists' work is exhibited annually, providing a rare opportunity for the artists to display and discuss their work with audience members.

*"For three hours a week, I am not in prison, I am not a product of a dysfunctional family, I'm not from the projects. **I'm anything I want to be.**"*

~ RTA member, Bedford Hills, NY's only maximum security prison for women

RTA operates in five maximum and medium-security NY State correctional facilities within a 100-mile radius of NYC:

- **Bedford Hills Correctional Facility**, Bedford Hills, Westchester County
- **Fishkill Correctional Facility**, Beacon, Dutchess County
- **Green Haven Correctional Facility**, Stormville, Dutchess County
- **Sing Sing Correctional Facility**, Ossining, Westchester County
- **Woodbourne Correctional Facility**, Woodbourne, Sullivan County

The **Reentry Project** meets in New York City.



www.dramaclubnyc.org

Drama Club is an innovative non-profit organization that provides theatre programming to incarcerated and court-involved young people in New York City.

It is Drama Club's mission to provide theater training and positive mentor relationships to youth throughout each step of their journey through the criminal justice system: **detention, placement, and probation.**

Drama Club is committed to providing New York City's most vulnerable youth the opportunity to laugh, play, and cultivate life skills through improvisational theatre.



Our curriculum is **improvisation-based**. Improv is play: it involves healthy risk-taking and empowers youth to tell the stories they want to tell, in the ways in which they want to tell them. The curriculum includes a strong Youth Leadership component. Theatre classes and performance opportunities build leadership skills in young people by teaching collaborative problem solving, working as a team, flexibility, resilience, communication and group decision-making. All of the games, improvisation, listening and responding, and story building that happens in Drama Club classes develops leadership skills that change these young people in profound ways.

*After seeing John Legend and his talented cast mates perform, one Drama Club member reflects, "Today was just like a look at **where I can be if I keep on this path.**"*



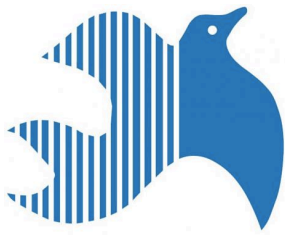
Drama Club Founder & Executive Director Josie Whittlesey on the **WSJ Live** program, Lunch Break.
<https://vimeo.com/128291461>



Actor / Drama Club Board Member, Susan Kelechi Watson, brought a group of Drama Club's graduates (who are currently peer mentors) to visit the set of NBC Live's "Jesus Christ, Superstar," where John Legend met with them to encourage them to follow their theater dreams.

Currently Drama Club is offered at five different sites:

- **Crossroads Juvenile Center** in Brooklyn
- **Horizon Juvenile Center** in the South Bronx
- **The Robert N. Davoren Center (RNDC)** on Rikers Island for adolescent boys
- **The Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC)** on Rikers Island for adolescent girls and young women
- **The Door** for systems-involved youth in lower Manhattan



The Fortune Society
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www.fortunesociety.org



Housing
Employment Services
Education
Family Services
Alternatives to Incarceration
Mental Health Services
Substance Use Treatment
Health Services
Benefits Referral
Food and Nutrition
Creative Arts ▶
Prepare for Release

"The staff at Fortune had a profound impact in my life and helped me discover my passion for music. They've served as my role models and taught me everything from voice lessons to musical theory.



Fortune's Creative Arts program has enabled me to grow emotionally and professionally, and to thrive for the first time in my life.

The arts are crucial to our personal growth — without Fortune, we would have never been given the opportunity to take creative writing classes, write poetry, perform spoken word, take creative video animation classes, make music, or create art.

Many of us have gone through traumatic experiences, and thanks to Fortune, **creative expression has helped us to heal.**

I've discovered my passion and **my stepping stone towards a better life."**

~ Anthony Cruz

Our creative arts programs support the **educational, emotional, and cultural development** of individuals impacted by the criminal justice system through creative writing, poetry, spoken word, video production, animation, visual arts, music classes, and theater.

ANNUAL CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

An annual, month-long celebration of the imagination and creativity of our participants and partners.

CREATIVE WRITING, POETRY, AND SPOKEN WORD

Throughout creative writing workshops, participants learn to shape selected life experiences into well-crafted stories, which are then presented to peers and members of the local community. Fortune's graduates present their stories at several performances, including our **annual Arts Festival**.

VIDEO PRODUCTION AND ANIMATION

Our multimedia production class allows students to gain computer and video production skills, and learn all aspects of the filmmaking process by capturing their own stories and sharing with others in the community by producing "mini-documentaries" and even full-length films. We also developed a partnership with **The Animation Project (TAP)**, which uses digital art technology as a tool to engage youth in group therapy sessions, cultivating self-expression, improving self-esteem, enhancing social and emotional coping skills, while also fostering the development of practical computer competencies that transfer to many career and education paths.

MUSIC CLASSES

We offer students individual instruction in guitar, keyboard, and voice, and hold group music classes, which frequently lead to powerful discussions about the lives of the participants. Our staff engages participants by asking questions about their favorite artists or songs and their own performance style, inviting them to share the music that most interests them.

MUSIC CAFE

Each month, music students and others with musical talents can perform at our **Music Café**, a lunchtime show for the entire Fortune community. The show is a wonderfully eclectic mix of styles reflecting the diverse age range and background of our community, and often features a wide range of genres, including classical, country, pop, and hip hop.

VISUAL ARTS

For more than three years, we have collaborated with the **Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)** to conduct workshops about artistic expression, which are then featured in the **MoMA Community Partners Show**.

THE PUBLIC THEATRE

Since forming a partnership in 2010, there are a variety of ways that **The Public Theater** has brought the experience of performing arts to Fortune, including the Mobile Shakespeare Unit, Public Works, and the creation of Fortune's in-house acting troupe, The Fortune Tellers. Fortune staff and inmates have also participated in the Public Theater's annual Shakespeare in the Park productions.



Voices UnBroken is a Bronx-based nonprofit organization dedicated to providing underheard members of the community – primarily youth, ages 12-24 – with the tools and opportunity for creative self-expression.

Voices Beyond Bars

Voices Beyond Bars workshops take place on Rikers Island and in juvenile justice facilities (including secure and non-secure detention, and non-secure placement facilities). Workshops generally meet twice a week for five weeks, for a total of 10 individual 90-minute workshop sessions.

Young people who participate in Voices Beyond Bars workshops learn new tools for coping with stress, communicating their thoughts, feelings and emotions, and moving past trauma.

By helping participants develop fundamental communication skills, Voices UnBroken is also contributing to the betterment of the communities they come from and/or will return to.

"The young people we seek out are the ones who have not yet had the opportunity to discover - and fall in love - with their own unique voice:

young people who are more likely to **pick a fight than write a poem,**

young people who have so much to say that **they say nothing,**

young people who are terrified that they will **"do it wrong,"**

young people who are uncomfortable being in groups,

and will say flat out that they **"don't do poetry."**

Voices UnBroken
engaged

754

Participants in 2015



THE IMPACT OF CREATIVE ARTS

IN SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL REENTRY AND
ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

2017



The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS



Our participant Ervin “Easy” Hunt sings at the Music Café as part of the 2017 Spring Arts Festival, along with Jonathan Finkelman on the guitar, and Samuel Rivera and Stanley Richards on the percussion drums.

INTRODUCTION

2017 marks the 50th Anniversary of The Fortune Society. Born from our founder David Rothenberg’s 1967 production of *Fortune and Men’s Eyes*, we have maintained a deeply rooted history in the arts. *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* highlighted injustices within the criminal justice system, and drew passionate feedback from justice-involved individuals and the general public. A few weeks after its opening production, David encouraged conversation with cast and audiences members around the play’s thought-provoking subject matter. These discussions sparked a need to give justice-individuals new paths to hope, one that we’ve been on ever since.

For the last half century, we’ve been committed to using the transformative power of art to support successful reentry and alternatives to incarceration, as well as a tool to galvanize broader support for criminal justice reform and an end to mass incarceration in the United States. Through creativity, we have built community, transformed lives, and encouraged renewed spirits of optimism and hope in the thousands of people who walk through our doors each year.

In this new report, see recent highlights of our Creative Arts program, and the ways it helps build a world where all justice-involved individuals can find positive paths to personal fulfillment.

50
years of using the
transformative
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Guy Woodard explains the meaning of the artwork that a group of students in his class produced. The light glows on the jackhammer with the word “Fortune” enscribed on it, breaking away pieces of the large block that represent the negative forces impacting the lives of our participants. The pieces flying away represent positive opportunities for change, growth, healing, and hope for a better future.

MISSION AND VISION

The Fortune Society’s mission is to support successful reentry from incarceration and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities.

Our vision is to foster a world where all who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated will thrive as positive, contributing members of society.

CREATIVE ARTS AT FORTUNE

In recent years, we have continued to integrate our Creative Arts program into a number of other services that we offer, including Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI), Education, Treatment Services, and Housing. This integration promotes active engagement in learning through new and exciting ways. To strengthen our creative arts offerings, John Runowicz became Manager

of Creative Arts in 2015. An ethnomusicologist, author, and guitarist, John uses his skill set and own experience with justice involvement to provide our participants with innovative outlets for self-expression.

In 2016, we continued expanding our Creative Arts program, helping over 200 participants develop new skills and explore healthy paths to creative expression. We have also worked to maximize strategic partnerships with established artists and creative organizations, further contributing to our participants’ overall wellbeing. In addition, we have innovatively educated the community at large about the need for criminal justice reform, and brought the perspectives of formerly incarcerated artists into New York City’s arts and culture sector.

PRISON-TO-ARTS PIPELINE

To help address the severe lack of diversity in NYC’s arts and culture sector, we are embarking on an ambitious project that will leverage our unique position as a reentry provider deeply rooted in the arts. In the coming year, we will continue to mobilize and expand our network of partners, and work collaboratively to lay the groundwork for a series of “prison-to-the-arts-pipelines.” Through these efforts, **we aim to increase diversity in NYC’s arts and culture sector, and expose our participants to professional artists, formal and informal arts education programs, outlets for creative expression, and viable pathways for careers in arts and culture industries.**

NYC is the ideal environment to showcase new talents, and with our growing network of partners, we will also be able to offer multiple platforms for our participants to shine. The more exposure they receive, the more creative opportunities they will have to learn, grow, and thrive.

200+
participants
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Our Education Counselor Osi Gerald performs in the Public Theater's Public Works 2016 production of Twelfth Night, alongside a younger co-performer, at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. The musical production featured more than 200 New Yorkers of all ages.

ACTING/THEATER

The Public Theater/Public Works

Since 2010, we have partnered with [The Public Theater](#) to give our participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in the theater arts. 2013, the inaugural year of the theater's **Public Works** initiative, culminated with a three-night production of *The Tempest* in Central Park's Delacorte Theater. Since then, we have continued this extraordinary partnership, with Fortune participants and staff being cast in the theater's production of *The Odyssey* in 2015 and *Twelfth Night* in 2016. Through these experiences, members of the Fortune community have worked alongside renowned individuals in the theater arts, including Tony-nominated actor Brandon Victor Dixon, director Kwame Kwei-Armah, and composer, lyricist, and performer Shaina Taub.

In partnership with The Public Theater, we also offer acting classes to our participants, which culminates in a performance at our annual **Spring Arts Festival**. Through speech exercises and the exploration of different theater roles, participants improve their

self-awareness, communication, and public speaking skills, all of which are essential for successful reentry.

Theater of the Oppressed NYC

[Theatre of the Oppressed NYC \(TONYC\)](#) forms theater troupes with community members who face pressing socioeconomic, health, and human rights issues. These troupes devise and perform plays based on their real-life struggles. After each performance, actors and audiences engage in theatrical brainstorming called Forum Theatre, with the goal of generating creative change at individual, community, and political levels.

In May 2016, The Fortune Society theater troupe was featured as part of TONYC's Fourth Annual Legislative Theater Festival #WatchActVote, held at the New School in New York City. Our troupe shared the difficult challenges faced by individuals with criminal justice histories when trying to obtain housing. Hundreds attended this unique, interactive performance, where actors and audience members collectively generated policy solutions, and public officials had opportunities to give feedback. Present in the audience were Council Members Carlos Menchaca (District 38) and Jimmy Van Bramer (District 26), Commissioner Vicki Been, and Leila Bozorg, Chief of Staff of NYC Housing Preservation and Development.



At the 2016 Legislative Theatre Festival #WatchActVote, our acting troupe performed scenes to reveal the challenges New Yorkers face in obtaining safe, supportive, affordable housing, particularly formerly incarcerated homeless individuals and veterans.



Guy Woodard's artwork was featured in an exhibition titled "Mass Incarceration: An Artist's Resistance," as part of The Beyond the Bars Conference held at Columbia University in March 2017.

Also in May 2016, we worked with TONYC to hold a rally on the steps of City Hall, calling attention to the unique needs of formerly incarcerated veterans. Jerry, a former Fortune participant, member of our acting troupe, and veteran, spoke at the rally about the importance of the acting troupe in his life. He noted that past experiences with discrimination made him feel rejected, but working with other troupe members to channel those experiences into works of art was truly life-changing. His story showed how troubling circumstances can be transformed into advocacy tools for needed reform.

VISUAL ARTS

Drawing Classes

Guy Woodard, a formerly incarcerated individual and gifted artist, came to Fortune in 2015 as a teacher. Last year, over **200 Fortune participants**, mainly those in our Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) program, participated in his drawing classes. Guy teaches them how to achieve their hopes and dreams through art. "Start from one point," he says, "Everything will come from that one point."

For his students, this first lesson is powerful—it transforms wishes into tangible reminders. Under Guy's instruction, they draw the apartment they hope to have and the communities they find acceptance in. This creative process not only helps them envision paths forward, but often changes their outlook on art. Hidden talents are discovered, self-esteem is strengthened, and personal identities are explored in new ways. "They were rushing out the door [in the beginning]. Now, it gets to [the end of class] and we're trying to kick them out," Guy jokes. Indeed, Guy's class is a good example of how art can be used to successfully impact participants that may have difficulty engaging in other settings.

Now, others, including press outlets and universities, are taking note of these powerful results. In September 2016, *City Limits* published an [in-depth article](#) on the impact of our Creative Arts program, and included interviews with Fortune staff members like Guy. And this year, Guy presented original work at Columbia University's Beyond the Bars Conference, an annual, student-driven, interdisciplinary conference on mass incarceration.

Partnerships: Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and New Museum

Since 2007, MoMA's Community Partnership program has worked with nonprofit and community-based organizations throughout New York City to create new ways of accessing MoMA's collection. We're



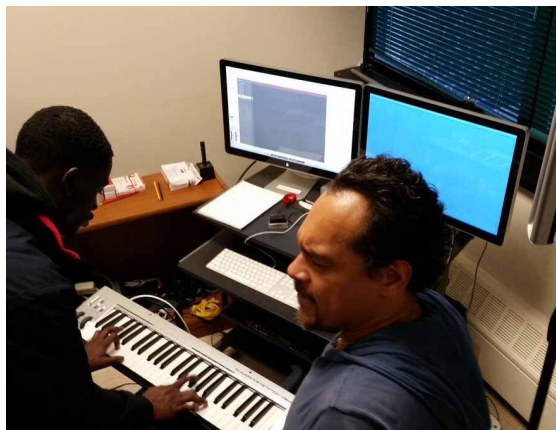
Guy Woodard masterfully rendering a new piece using just a ballpoint pen.

honored to be among those involved, and have participated in several MoMA Community Partner Art Shows. We have also planned group visits to MoMA studios and gallery spaces at MoMA and the New Museum, offering our participants opportunities to discuss and create art as a community. We look forward to continue working with MoMA and the New Museum, and giving participants a glimpse into art that has shaped the world.

MUSIC

Keyboarding & Singing Lessons

Since 2012, Fortune has offered weekly keyboard and voice classes for individuals and groups. Today, these classes are taught by our Manager of Creative Arts, John Runowicz, and focus on building basic techniques and developing original music. Through instruction and collaboration, students build confidence and community. In 2016, over 140 participants attended these classes. In the future, we hope to expand our class offerings to include guitar instruction.



A member of the Road Recovery team helps an ATI participant craft an original song.

Songwriting

Since 1998, [Road Recovery](#) has been dedicated to helping young people battle substance use and other adversities by harnessing the influence of entertainment industry professionals who have confronted similar crises and now wish to share their experience, knowledge, and resources. Through their RoadTrax program, they offer participants in our ATI program creative workshops, hands-on mentorship training, educational performance workshops, peer-support networking, and opportunities to create and present live-concert events and recording projects. Working with Road Recovery's creative staff, participants find musical ways to tell their stories – lyric by lyric.

Music Cafe

Each month, participants, staff members, and others with a passion for music have a chance to perform at our monthly **Music Café**, led by John Runowicz. Held during lunch time at our Long Island City, Queens offices, these individuals share live music for the entire Fortune community to enjoy.

WRITING/POETRY

Creative Writing

[Jamie Maleszka](#) is a freelance writer from New York City who has written for several publications, including The Brooklyn Rail, Mass Appeal, and The Playlist. Her creative writing workshop at Fortune begins with group readings, followed by discussions designed to encourage the group to find parallels between what was read and their own lives, then share those parallels through written works. The class is an open, supportive environment where participants can engage with powerful writing, understand different writing techniques, and strengthen their own writing skills. Though students may be at varying reading and writing levels, they engage at their own pace, and share the experience of learning and growing as a group. Through participant word of mouth, Jamie's workshop is growing in popularity— we look forward to continue seeing it blossom.

DANCE

Hip Hop Dance Classes

Founded in 1996, [The Mark Morris Dance Group](#) (MMDG) provides educational opportunities in dance and music to people of all ages and abilities. 10 participants from our ATI program enrolled in this new offering, and the initial feedback from this group was extremely positive. Mark Morris taught the participants an eight-piece choreography, in preparation for a final performance. In January 2017, we started our second offering of the workshop with 12 participants enrolled. Through this program, participants find freedom in a new form of creative expression and build confidence through movement.

VIDEO PRODUCTION

Animation Classes

[The Animation Project \(TAP\)](#) is a NYC-based nonprofit arts organization that works to nurture the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of at-risk youth, using digital art technology as a therapeutic medium and a workforce development tool. Over the years, this remarkable organization has become one of our strongest Creative Arts partners, equipping dozens of participants with animation skills at our main service center in Long Island City, Queens. Participant engagement in their 16-week class has been extremely high. Fortune participants have produced over 20 animated videos since our partnership began.

**“[*The Castle Play*]
really helped me
understand, to whatever
extent possible, what
people who were
formerly incarcerated
went through.”**

-The Castle Play audience member



*Cast members from a previous cycle of *The Castle play* share their stories.*

The Castle Play

[The Castle](#) play is an original Fortune production directed by David Rothenberg, and co-written and performed by former residents of The Fortune Academy (“the Castle”), our transitional housing facility in West Harlem. David produced the groundbreaking play in 2008 and it played Off Broadway for over a year. Featuring personal accounts of formerly incarcerated individuals who lived at the Castle, David continues to direct the play, not only in New York City, but across the country, in prisons, universities, churches, and other community-based organizations.

A survey was distributed to audience members at two recent performances, and most who responded reported that they were encouraged to become involved in criminal justice reform after watching

the play. One respondent stated that he learned how “the system destroys people,” and how an institution like Fortune “may help those who want to break the cycle.” Another stated, “You have really helped me understand, to whatever extent possible, what people who were formerly incarcerated went through.” This feedback highlights the power of this play, as well as the power of arts to humanize the experience of incarceration.

TO GET INVOLVED, CONTACT:

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**TO DONATE, VISIT OUR
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