



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

COLLEGE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES
& SOCIAL SCIENCES
Prison Arts Initiative

Prison Arts Initiative (DU PAI)

The University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative promotes access to high-quality therapeutic arts programs to incarcerated people in Colorado with the goal of empowering individuals to improve the quality of their lives and prepare to make positive changes in their communities upon release. DU PAI sees this work as part of DU's commitment to be "a great private university dedicated to the public good."

DU PAI Mission

DU PAI generates creative and collaborative learning experiences that enrich the lives of incarcerated people and shift the conversation about prison.

DU PAI Values

DU PAI:

- Provides therapeutic, educational creative arts programming to incarcerated people and their families in Colorado state prisons;
- Facilitates dialogue and storytelling between incarcerated people and their communities via exhibits, performances, media, and commissioned works;
- Creates caring communities for students characterized by learning, creative expression, and authentic human connection;
- Delivers shared arts-based learning experiences to incarcerated people, correctional staff, and DU students
- Engages leadership of incarcerated people in the development and delivery of programming.
- Offers training and consulting on the use of the arts to liberate people and transform spaces in correctional settings;
- Conducts rigorous research to examine the impact of the arts on personal and social narratives of crime, incarceration, harm, and healing.
- DU PAI is central to DU's commitment to be "a great private university dedicated to the public good."

Programs Offered – Writing Component

- Sterling Correctional Facility, Creating Action through Words and Movement – 14 Sessions (Fall 2019)
- La Vista Correctional Facility, Writing the Breath – 14 Sessions (Fall 2019)
- Four Mile Correctional Facility, Portable Magic: A Book Discussion Workshop (Fall 2019)
- Non-Fiction Writing - 12 Sessions (Summer 2019)
- DRDC: Movement and Creative Writing - 12 Sessions (Spring 2019)
- DRDC: Playwriting Workshop - 12 sessions (Spring 2018)
- Sterling: Podcast Workshop (On-Going)

2135 East Wesley Avenue, # 304
Denver, CO 80210

Email: prisonarts@du.edu
Phone: 303.871.5241

Partnership with Colorado Department of Corrections

- DU PAI recently began a 3-year contract from CDOC to provide programming in 6 facilities across the state, with the goal of adding one facility/year.
- Part of that contract is to produce a monthly podcast, This Is Within, in partnership with CDOC administration, and a newsletter, Reverberations, that supports the podcast and circulate through all CDOC facilities.
- The contract also includes family reunification events across the state, and site-specific creative writing, theatre, and dance workshops.
- CDOC Director Dean Williams, a strong proponent of Normalization, has allowed DU PAI to take theatre productions to both other facilities and to the public; he also contributes to podcast content.

Program Outcomes, Fall 2019

The DU PAI research team conducted Pre- and Post-Evaluations with **123 participants** who engaged in DU PAI Fall programs. Through quantitative surveys, participants responded that at the end of the workshop period, they reported feeling (1) more connected to the people in the workshop, (2) more like community members of DU PAI and their institution, (3) more like leaders in the facility, (4) more comfortable speaking in a group, and (5) more like they affect people in positive ways than at the beginning of the DU PAI workshop.

Through qualitative responses, participants reflected that their experiences in DU PAI programs in comparison to other programs and places at their institution left them feeling **more connected with themselves and the group, a sense of safety and openness with others, and a sense of accomplishment**. In reflecting how people interacted in the DU PAI program in comparison to other programs or places at their institution, participants reported **more healthy expression of conflict and differences in opinion**, alongside **more authenticity and vulnerability**. Participant testimonials, “Creative Action through Writing and Dance”:

“This is the most positive & impacted program that I have ever been a part of.”

“I was able to find myself.”

“It was hard, but I’m glad I took part and I will carry that to future workshops, if allowed.”

“The focus on creativity, expression, community, and humanity is not a common combination in prison. How people are able to drop their defences and inhibitions. Prison conditions you to do exactly the opposite. To accomplish this in a few short months is remarkable. Just thank you! This is a huge renewal of faith for me – faith in the prison system, the inmates in the system, and people in general.”