

MUSIC IN PRISONS

Community Justice Coalition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Studies have shown that inmates who engage in meaningful activities that keep their minds occupied while incarcerated have fewer violent incidents and better mental health and recidivism outcomes once their term of incarceration is complete.¹

The ability to create art and music has far-reaching and therapeutic impacts for inmates and creates great change in the prison environment. Jail Guitar Doors, a Music Arts program with the California Department of Corrections in the USA has found that Arts in corrections programs reduce recidivism by about 60 percent. Music also allows relationships inside the correctional facility to be more peaceful, as inmates are able to connect on a very human level through music.²

There is no known culture without music, music-making, and listening. This plays a critical role in facilitating development, social cohesion, and cultural teaching for all people at all stages of life.³ A Griffith University paper by Dr Alexis Kallio and Ms Alexandra Gorton highlights a number of successful examples of music programs for both youth and adult correctional facilities, indicating the personal, social and rehabilitative benefits which music can have for groups and individuals⁴

A simple app on an appropriate and approved device with a headset and microphone, and managed access to the internet, is all that is needed to put a meaningful music program into prisons. Inmates are able to sing, create beats, learn certain instruments and compose songs. Given the immense need for inmate rehabilitation, more prisons should focus on creative programs with positive impacts on inmates. Correctional Facilities state that programs in Arts improved emotional literacy, understanding of self, capacity to express emotion, increased empathy, and supported a reduction of impulsive behaviors.⁵

These programs give inmates a chance to show persistence, creativity and flexibility. These are all values that are consistent with stability for inside and outside of prison. If the goals are rehabilitation, we need to ask hard questions that require a deep look into the systems in place. Innovative thinking is required to lower the prison population and enable prisoners to gain valuable tools and confidence to help them to stop reoffending. Life in prison can be

¹ (https://www.gtl.net/music_can_improve_inmate_behavior/).

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(<https://correctionalnews.com/2013/08/01/musical-remedies-look-reduce-recidivism/#:~:text=Jail%20Guitar%20Doors%20has%20found,very%20human%20level%20through%20music>).

³ [Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report.pdf](#)

⁴ [Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report.pdf](#)

⁵ (<https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/prisonartsresourceprojectapril20188.pdf>).

extremely hard but it is important to be reminded that prisoners are still human and rehabilitation and reformation is still possible for those behind bars.⁶



MUSIC PROGRAMS IN PRISONS

Music programs, especially those where you are forming a band or learning an instrument, require participants to step outside comfort zones, demonstrate dedication, bravery, empathy, and respect.⁷ It gives inmates skills to also connect to their community. Prison music program directors believe that when inmates engage in Liberal Arts, social and cognitive skills improve. Some inmates feel when they are able to express themselves through something like music in prison, it gives meaning to their life. The skills and attitudes developed from music programs help inmates to transition back into society more easily.⁸ The skills learned from the Arts programs in prison also helped them achieve their goals once they were released.⁹

California's Arts in Corrections (AIC) finds that Correctional arts education offers more than creative ways for inmates to pass the time. Studies of AIC's first incarnation found that participating prisoners had 75 percent fewer disciplinary actions, and were up to 27 percent less

⁶ (<https://jgspl.org/the-role-of-music-in-inmate-rehabilitation/>).

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(<https://www.cutcommonmag.com/this-music-program-is-giving-australian-inmates-skills-to-reconnect-in-their-communities/>)

⁸ http://www.cicj.org/uploads/cicj/documents/brewster_prison_arts_final_formatted.pdf

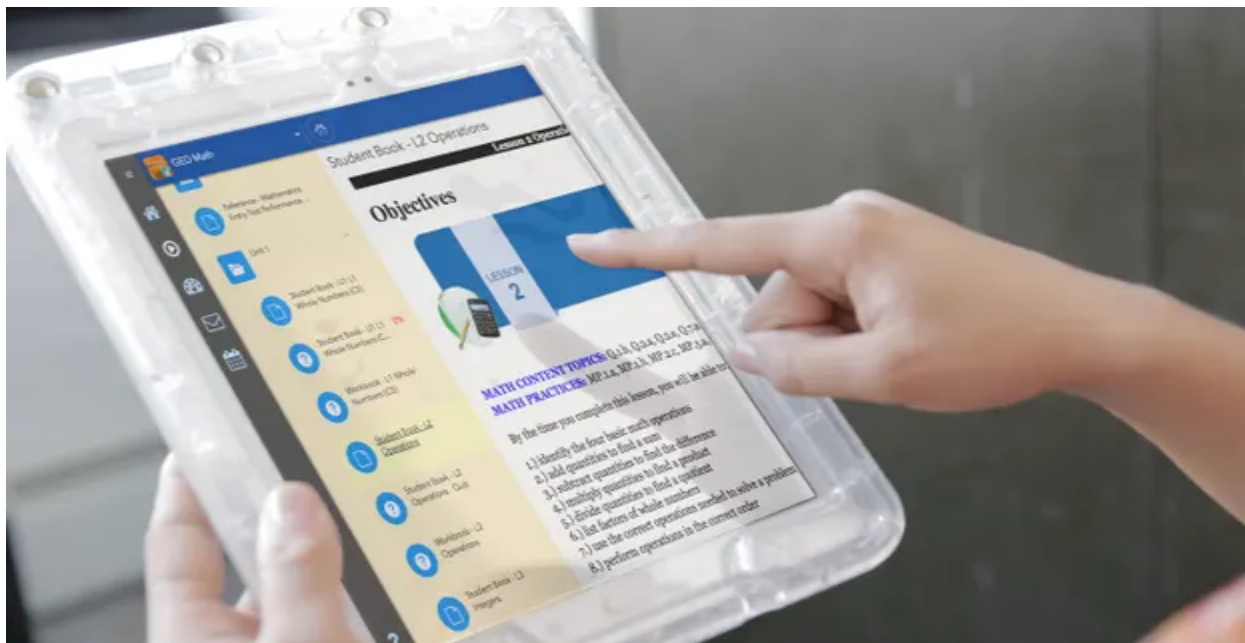
⁹

(<https://jgspl.org/the-role-of-music-in-inmate-rehabilitation/#:~:text=Given%20the%20immense%20need%20for,help%20them%20significantly%20once%20released>).

likely to reoffend upon release.¹⁰ These are surprising numbers for some of the toughest prisons in the USA, with some of the highest gang and prison violence.

HOW DO WE GET MUSIC INTO PRISONS?

The Computers in Cells program has been accepted and managed access adopted. The importance of having devices inside prison cells with beneficial applications such as web based domestic violence programs and online counseling services has been presented. The educational, legal and social benefits make this a much needed program and successful examples exist in the ACT and Victoria. There has been much research and advancement especially on the security and legitimacy issues of computers in cells. Prisons have started incrementally rolling out technology but adopted a cautious approach.¹¹ Besides making up physical programs, access to technology is needed in this approach for better rehabilitation. With technology we can streamline the approach of Music and Arts into the Correctional facilities in Australia in a very affordable way.



¹⁰

(<https://www.vice.com/en/article/z4yqjx/gangbangers-and-guitars-how-music-is-keeping-people-from-going-back-to-prison>).

¹¹ (<https://justiceaction.org.au/history-of-the-computers-in-cells-project/>).

PRISON DEVICE OPTIONS

[Article comparing tech devices for educational use within prisons](#)¹²

Some inmates currently have access to tablets, but to be able to access music, education and other services such as counseling for rehabilitation we recommend a laptop.

- Clear laptop
 - \$165USD per unit ++ Extra costs incurred for changing panels and memory of the device (at Shenzhen Vitek). AMD is \$165 while Intel is \$169.¹³
 - Shenzhen Vitek Electronics Co., Ltd¹⁴ are able to supply clear back laptops,
 - The following criteria was given for the laptops:
 - Ram 8gb, screen size 16", microphone, speakers, and video camera
 - Can be used for video calls and online use
 - Is suitable to be used in a prison setting
- The ELED TV has a factory researching small LCD display series. The hardware and software of the devices can be customized to act similarly to a computer.
 - ELED TV is currently offering two models of clear jail LED TV run with remote controls as shown below:



- The only difference between the two TVs are the powerboard and the signal mainboard that are either all in one or individually separated (small difference). The function and **cost** are both the same.
 - The TVs can be customized into smart TVs.
 - 15.6 inch Jail Led tv DVB-T2 500PCS = \$66.78 USD (\$96.92 AUD)¹⁵
 - 18.5 inch Jail Led tv DVB-T2 500PCS = \$83.5USD (\$121.21 AUD)¹⁶
- Computer option

¹² [Article comparing tech devices for educational use within prisons](#)

¹³ [Shenzhen Vitek](#)

¹⁴ [Shenzhen Vitek Electronics Co., Ltd](#)

¹⁵ <https://www.eledtv.com/product/15-6-jail-led-tv/>

¹⁶ <https://www.eledtv.com/product/18-5-jail-led-tv/>

- If these computers are physically secure and monitored, then there is no reason why these computers cannot be implemented as personal computers.
- Physically secure.
- Staff have access to monitoring and restricting use of the computers
- Tablet + keyboard option
 - If the concern of cost is really high, then a more cost effective option might be providing inmates with keyboards to use with their tablets.
 - A concern raised in this document was that tablets do not allow for enough screen space, providing inmates with keyboards would solve this issue.
- Chromebook
 - Functionally very similar to laptop
 - Addresses concerns with tablets about keyboard/mouse pad - it can be used as a tablet with touchpad or with the magnetic keyboard/mouse pad attachment
 - Also has webcam, microphone, speakers, and can connect to headphones via jack or bluetooth
 - Screen size similar to tablet (10-14"), however none of screen is used up by keyboard
 - Minimum of 4GB of RAM
 - Easily set up for managed access to apps and internet
 - Many accessibility options
 - Restrictions include: no USB, HDMI, CD or AUX ports; Charging port and audio jack are one in the same
 - Has access to all apps in Google Play store
 - Includes all Google Drive apps
 - Has access to a variety of Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) apps for audio recording and production, including BandLab
 - Access to a number of mental health apps and websites, including the MindSpot site

With any of these options Technology and the Internet is needed for this program to be efficient and effective.



Recommended APP: BandLab

Access to an app called BandLab is recommended for the initial steps of a music program. BandLab helps you to make music wherever you are, it also has an idea generator to help inspire songwriting and new music. It's a free program that works on MAC, PC and other devices. It's a starting point for an outlet for inmates to creatively express themselves, rather than violently.

BandLab offers unlimited collaboration, downloads, and secure storage. You can use your keyboard to make a variety of instrument sounds or connect via MIDI. You can record your voice or any sound. The app also allows you to create beats and rhythms in seconds. You can plug in a bass or a guitar to use BandLab as an amp or use the 200 free virtual instruments available to you to make music.

In order to use BandLab you will need an audio interface to use instruments or a microphone. You can work offline with projects on BandLab, but you will need to be online to download instruments and sounds, and save or publish your tracks. BandLab is cloud based, so when using the cloud you will need the internet. There are several youtube videos to help beginners such as this one, https://youtu.be/TAHn_0Vy-Zg.



Equipment:

For this program to be optimal we would require the bare minimum of headphones with a microphone capability. Headphones are offered on the Correction facilities Buy-Up list already. This would allow inmates access to the songwriters portion of the app, where their creativity can be fostered in the app's songwriting program.

Headphones will also be utilized while inmates are creating beats or composing songs. The earphones serve to allow them to create beats and rhythms without disturbance of their cellmate. Here is an example of headphones from a prison in New York, New York in America with several versions and ideas of headphones for inmates to utilize while using this app .¹⁷



¹⁷ (<https://wilsoninmatepackageprogram.com/koss-cl-20-headphones/>)

Issues:

The foreseeable issue is that we would need officials to approve the BandLab app, for inmates to use so that they can promptly partake in and benefit from music programs in prisons.

Managing security of application use poses a complex challenge, requiring collaboration between application providers, technology providers and state correctional authorities. For example, there is a messaging interface on the app that would require disabling whilst being used in correctional facilities.

To maximize the efforts of this program in the future there should be consideration for a creative songwriting/rap course, music rooms, incentives for musical instruments, and inmates to form bands, musical groups and choirs. Musical performers could be invited to facilities, and poetry or other arts performances would also make this program a success.

PROGRAMS THAT SHOWCASE VALUE OF MUSIC AND ARTS

THE LULLABY PROJECT:

In Australia, music can offer a vital support in creating a sense of normalcy in an abnormal environment, creating strong child attachment. This can also support infant development through learning, stimulation, and socialization. The Lullaby Project is a resource available to the very youngest child to help parents provide musical relationships with their children. It was founded over 20 years ago by Thomas Cabaniss and helps incarcerated mothers and fathers write lullabies for their children. It's a touching memory you leave for your child and for yourself as well.¹⁸

Oakdale Prison Choir: <https://oakdalechoir.lib.uiowa.edu/>

Alliance for Higher Education: <https://www.higheredinprison.org/2022-ncchp>

Music in Prisons: <https://youtu.be/eiReLsAEi9g>

DocSong: <https://www.docsong.org/>

The Australian Children's Music Foundation (ACMF): <https://acmf.com.au/>

Listening to Country: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4054019

¹⁸[Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report.pdf](#)

Finding Rhythms UK:

<https://www.finding-rhythms.co.uk/#:~:text=About%20Finding%20Rhythms&text=We%20deliver%20collaborative%20music%2Dmaking,individuals%20to%20improve%20their%20lives.>

MUSIC AND YOUTH JUSTICE

Young people in the criminal justice system experience issues in their life that often affect their daily wellbeing and stem from poverty, in turn, youth end up utilizing offending and reoffending behavior.¹⁹ It is said that youth are actually more likely to reoffend than adults.²⁰ We should seek to reform juvenile justice systems in ways that focus on a more positive, strength-based approach that addresses the current needs and future potential of the young people whom such systems should serve, not merely sentence.²¹ One effective way to do this is to improve the quality of education in the juvenile justice system through the inclusion of the arts. Music is welcomed as a transformative tool that transforms youth offenders into citizens.²²

Youth are consumed with music, it is a part of their culture, style and daily lives. This is especially true for teenagers. Dr. Kallio from Griffith University states that the potential of such music programs as creative songwriting/rap will allow youth to manage their issues and reflect on past and present behaviors. This helps them reframe themselves as creative rather than destructive.²³

Conclusion

Music has the capacity to promote wellbeing and rehabilitation. There is evidence to suggest that music helps with a variety of disorders including cardiac conditions, depression, autism, substance abuse and Alzheimer's disease. It can help with memory, lower blood pressure, improve coping, reduce stress, improve self-esteem and more.²⁴ Having access to music would dramatically reduce the chance of people in prison to reoffend, and evidence shows that any type of music program can help build emotional resilience and self-esteem

¹⁹ (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9566.12549>)

²⁰ (National Audit Office (2010))

²¹ (<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Carnegie.pdf>)

²² (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14613808.2022.2046719?journalCode=cmue20>).

²³ [Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report](#)

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<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/8817-music-therapy#:~:text=Music%20therapy%20is%20an%20evidence,improve%20self%2Desteem%20and%20more>

amongst those incarcerated.²⁵ Music improves the lives of inmates and better prepares them for re-entry into their communities. “It’s using music as a form of catharsis, as transformation, showing alternative possibilities in life,” said Chris Washburn, an Associate Professor of Music at Columbia University in the USA.²⁶

Australians espouse rehabilitation as their core purpose.²⁷ At 50% in all jurisdictions, repeat offenders return in 2 years or less.²⁸ This shows that in the current system rehabilitation is being neglected in prisons. Elements in prison that improve the rehabilitation climate include:

Inmate safety, support provided by correctional staff and inmates, and the perception of the climate/program to be supportive of change, growth and development.²⁹ Prison by nature can have a major impact on the behavior of the inmate especially if they are experiencing mental or physical illness, trauma, and/or addiction.

Dr. Alexis Kallio of Griffith University states that, “music offers a safe haven within the walls of the prisons where incarcerated youth and adults can explore who they are, and who they are becoming, musically, personally, and culturally”.³⁰ Her paper also talks about recent Australian research emphasizing the need for offenders to see themselves in ways less compatible with a criminal lifestyle and increase a feeling of belonging to a community.³¹

As stated earlier in this paper music programs in prisons aim to reduce recidivism, support rehabilitation, and create a safer environment within correctional facilities.³²

²⁵ <https://dimag.com/longreads/how-making-music-changing-lives-prison>

²⁶ <https://dimag.com/longreads/how-making-music-changing-lives-prison>

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8158235/#:~:text=These%20days%20correctional%20services%20in,correctional%20policy%20of%20the%20past>

²⁸ <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/repeat-offenders-account-for-half-of-prison-costs-20220127-p59rnj>

²⁹

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8158235/#:~:text=These%20days%20correctional%20services%20in,correctional%20policy%20of%20the%20past>

³⁰ [Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report.pdf](#)

³¹ [Music in Prisons A Preliminary Report.pdf](#)

³²

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/z4yqjx/gangbangers-and-guitars-how-music-is-keeping-people-from-going-back-to-prison>