



# JEP Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2011

## Art gets an **A+** from Students!

“This course has changed my life and my outlook on education”, this was the statement of a grateful and satisfied student participating in the art courses being offered at Lew Sterrett Justice Center. Starting in 2008, the Jail Education Program began offering art courses to students. This addition to an already well-rounded program would prove to be a tremendous asset.



Students participating in an art course offered by El Centro Jail

helpful discipline to a population of people who may otherwise not have the opportunity to learn about color wheels, blending, shading, dynamics of beginning drawing, and background and history of art.

Students taking art courses under the Jail Education Program are given the opportunity to channel their creativity in a positive manner. Art courses have proven to be therapeutic and a



“They [instructors] really care, and because they really care so much they inspire us every day to push ourselves and continue to learn.”

## Mental Health and Art

Starting in 2009, El Centro’s Jail Education Program was asked to partner with Parkland Jail Mental Health to offer art courses to the behavior observation inmates in Lew Sterrett’s West Tower. Art instructors

Sandra Lara and Alan Pineda have worked closely with specially trained officers to provide the students with a course that offers them the outlet to develop and sharpen artistic skills while incarcerated. The art courses

have recently expanded, and are now offered to both male and female inmates. Many of the behavior observation inmates are immensely talented in their artistic abilities and are handpicked by the

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# Mental Health and Art



Officer Ninan helping get the Mental Health art class started.

mental health doctors to participate in this program.

Mental health art classes have been vital in reconstructing the “lock em’ up and throw away the key” mentality that has faced mental health inmates in the past. Many of the students in this program have incredible talent, instructor Sandra

Lara states “it really surprised me at the amount of untapped, raw talent that the mental health students have”. Officer Ninan has been instrumental as working as a liaison between Parkland Jail Mental Health, the Sheriff’s Department, and El Centro College to continue to recruit and promote this program among the inmates. To-

day, these art courses are a sought after commodity among mental health inmates due to the valuable skills they develop by partaking in each class session.



## Spotlight Student

*“It really surprised me at the amount of untapped, raw talent that the mental health art students have.”*

Robert Evans is currently taking courses in the Lew Sterrett’s West Tower. He is a former gang member, who has been in and out of prison since the age of 16. Mr. Evans comes from a long line of gang members, and decided earlier in his adult life he would break the cycle of racism in his family and leave his gang affiliation.

to leave his cell. Robert states “I could never have imagined how much this class was going to impact my life. This course has helped me to have such a positive outlook on things.” Mr. Evans spoke with sincerity about the ad-

color. I never knew about these things before.” Mr. Evans continually emphasized that this course has opened a new door for



him, and he is eager to continue his education at El Centro College.



Robert Evans is a current Mental Health Art student.

Robert has been in Lew Sterrett for a year, and began taking art courses about three months ago. Mr.

Evans said he dabbled in art, and originally joined the art class simply to have a way to leave his cell. Robert states “I could never have imagined how much this class was going to impact my life. This course has helped me to have such a positive outlook on things.” Mr. Evans spoke with sincerity about the admiration he has toward the art instructors. “Alan and Sandra are my inspiration. I mean that truthfully. They really care, and because they really care so much they inspire us every day to push ourselves and continue to learn.” Robert has been a tattoo artist for years, but states that he now sees art in a totally different way. “I now know how to look at art and study the detail, shape, and

Robert Evans is a talented and articulate man who has inflicted and endured his fair share of hardship, but is ready to embrace a new life making better choices. Upon finishing the interview, the final words Mr. Evans said as he turned toward his instructors was “You all inspire me daily, and I thank you so much for this opportunity.”

# Spotlight Student

Shirley Alfaro is a 28 year old single mother of five, who is currently enrolled in art and computer courses in Lew Sterrett's Kays Tower. Ms. Alfaro has loved art and drawing since she was a small child, but never received any formal art training until she started art classes under the Jail Education Program.



Shirley grew up in a very traditional Hispanic household, and her dreams of attending college and becoming an artist were strongly against the norm. She went to El Centro at the age of 18, and filled out an application to attend but was not able to complete the process. When asked about the

current art courses she is taking, Shirley's face lights up and her meek demeanor transforms to a much more confident air. "These courses have changed my whole mindset and outlook on life in general. Every day I get to do learn more about

something I am so passionate about, and I am able to focus all of my stress on my art." Ms. Lara's art class explores the work of Frida Kahlo, which was so insightful to Shirley. Frida Kahlo is one of Ms. Alfaro's favorite artist, she explains how she admires they way Kahlo is able to put all her emotions into her art and how she hopes to be able to do that one day. Shirley will continue her education when she is released, and looks forward to taking more art courses at El Centro College. A wrong decision lead Shirley Alfaro down a road of legal troubles, but she states "I think I started to go down the wrong path, and this experience has set me back on track. I think I am here for a reason, and now I know I am a strong talented woman, and capable of finishing a goal I once thought I never could."

*"Now I know I am a strong talented woman, and capable of finishing a goal I once thought I never could."*



Shirley Alfaro creating a cup drawing using her new skills.

## A Special Thanks

The Jail Education Program faculty and staff send many thanks to all our supporters that help make our program possible:

- Sheriff Lupe Valdez
- James Strickland, Director of Inmate Programs
- Yolanda Lara, Assistant Director of Inmate Programs
- Jane VanDeventer, Jail Education Program Administrator
- Officer V. Ninan, Mental Health Officer
- Dr. Ahmed, Parkland Jail Mental Health Coordinator



One of the many gorgeous art pieces from the Mental Health Art class.

# History Flash

The Jail Education Program began in 1973. El Centro College partnered with the Dallas County Sheriff's Department to create an innovative program designed to help reduce recidivism rates among Dallas County Inmates. Originally the program had 26 students and one classroom, and included a staff of 2. Within the past 15 years the program has expanded to include over 350 students, fourteen classrooms, six computer labs, four art rooms, and a staff of over 50 individuals. The Jail Program continues to work diligently to help reduce recidivism and provide its students with quality education that will make them a competitive asset to the workforce.

## Mission Statement

Making sense of the past to make a more logical future.

Valuing the student as its primary commitment, El Centro College provides educational opportunities for all individuals, recognizing that they bring diversity of purpose, circumstances, background, skills, and ability.

Keeping this commitment to the students of the Margaret Rippey Learning Center, the Jail Education program's mission is to serve as a beacon for students wanting to achieve academically, escalate self-esteem, and get back in touch with the best of oneself.

Instructors and students from this Center form a common partnership to embrace the thought that there can be no bars on the mind, no limits to self potential, no power like that found within. Through education, dedication, and persistence, the things that hurt before will hurt no more.



**Thank you for all your continued support!  
-Jail Education Program Faculty and Staff**

Please visit our website at :  
<http://www.elcentrocollege.edu/Program/Business/Jail/>

For more information contact:  
Jane VanDeventer  
(214) 860-2218