



RTASM
REHABILITATION
THROUGH THE ARTS

Annual Report 2020



Prison Communities International Inc. (PCI) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to criminal justice issues. Established in 1999, PCI is the parent company under which Rehabilitation Through the Arts operates.

RTA helps people in prison develop critical life skills through the arts, modeling an approach to the justice system based on human dignity rather than punishment.



Dear Friends,

2020 will be remembered by many as a year full of challenge, solitude and loss. But it was also a year of unusual silver linings, of rising to the challenge and of creatively finding new ways to communicate and to live.

The hallmark of RTA is creating community by being in proximity with each other inside and outside of prison. The loss of being together physically was deeply felt by our members, teaching artists, alumni, staff and board.

As I write this letter in June 2021, we are gradually returning to prison, meeting with members and scheduling fall in-person workshops. I am glad to say the RTA community remains intact and, in some ways, even stronger than before.

Here is a glimpse at how RTA navigated 2020:

- » In January we produced two productions—*Father Comes Home from the Wars* at Green Haven Correctional Facility and *Dutch Crown*, written by alumnus Philip Hall, at Woodbourne Correctional Facility—without knowing these would be our last productions for more than a year and a half.
- » In March the pandemic hit abruptly, and all NYS prisons were closed to community-based programs. Teaching artists quickly pivoted to developing paper lessons in all art forms, which we delivered to DOCCS personnel in prison parking lots.
- » In April, we were given an opportunity to communicate with our members by secure messages, the prison version of email, through JPAY, the prison version of tablets. We also received permission to hold weekly conference calls with senior RTA participants at each facility.

» Throughout the year we continued to refine distance learning through audio cassette and DVD lessons. Through secure messaging, we sent lessons in poetry, memoir, playwrighting, monologues and visual arts, addressing the specific needs of each individual member.

» In December we presented *Lulu, I Hear You... Messages from the Inside During Covid-19*, a virtual event in which RTA alumni and teaching artists shared writings from RTA incarcerated members.

» Through the year we stayed busy with countless Zoom meetings, virtual panels, work on a new website, social media campaigns, updated logo and messaging along with training for our teaching artists in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Culturally Responsive Education.

While 2020 was a truly difficult year for our members, who experienced far greater isolation and distress than those of us on the outside, I was overwhelmed by their resilience and by the beautiful art they continued to create. I am deeply grateful to everyone who helped keep RTA's mission strong by lending your time, generosity and encouragement—and I can't wait to see you in person soon!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Vockins". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Katherine Vockins
Founder & Executive Director
Rehabilitation Through the Arts

About RTA



Founded at Sing Sing in 1996, RTA provides an intensive, comprehensive arts program that builds critical life skills so that people can meet the challenges of connecting with family and community when released.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

PRE-PANDEMIC
January to March



Presented two full-scale theatre productions.



Welcomed home 21 members at our annual homecoming event.

PANDEMIC

March: The pandemic is declared and all programming and visits are shutdown. RTA responds by providing distance learning to help engage the creative process and raise hope for the future.

DISTANCE LEARNING BEGINS
April to May



Teaching artists develop lesson plans for individual learning including plans on audio cassettes made especially for prison.

"I KNOW OF NO OTHER ORGANIZATION THAT HAS DONE THIS MUCH DURING THIS TIME."

- RTA MEMBER AT SING SING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

THE NEW NORMAL
June to September



Distance learning activities continue with DVD lessons written, filmed and duplicated.



Lulu, I Hear You—a 30 character virtual performance piece based on writings about the pandemic from RTA members is presented.

Reducing Recidivism

THE IMPACT OF RTA PROGRAMS

Nationwide over 60% of people return to prison within three years of release.

60% +
NATIONAL RECIDIVISM RATE

Less than 5% of RTA members return to prison.

< 5%
RTA RECIDIVISM RATE



Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration

There are 1.8m people incarcerated in the US. Over 95% will eventually be released.

RTA members use their time productively in prison, and when released reconnect with their families and strengthen their communities, breaking a generational cycle.

Saving Money

The US spends over \$80 billion a year on incarceration.

RTA's proven impact on recidivism saves taxpayers millions of dollars each year.

Who We Serve

RTA operates in six maximum and medium-security men's and women's New York State correctional facilities within a 200-mile radius of New York City.

Women

Bedford Hills ■

Taconic ■

Men

Fishkill ■

Green Haven ■

Sing Sing ■

Woodbourne ■

■ MEDIUM SECURITY

■ MAXIMUM SECURITY

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

As an organization that works extensively with incarcerated people, we stand in solidarity with all people of color and all those oppressed by institutional inequality. As an arts organization, we are committed to telling the story of our shared humanity.

While structural racism and inequality are ingrained in every aspect of our society, these forces are particularly destructive in the criminal justice system. While RTA is not primarily an advocacy organization, we do have a role to play in countering racism and inequality.

Shifting the system from punishment to rehabilitation The current prison system in the US is based on punishment, with roots in a slavery-era society. Through our creative arts program, we work towards and advocate for an approach based on human dignity rather than punishment.

Changing the narrative We believe creating community support is an essential precursor to changing policy. We strive to create a platform for our alumni and incarcerated members to share their voices and for our community—participants, alumni, teaching artists, supporters, audience members—to challenge long-held assumptions about each other.

Reflection and change We recognize that no one, and no organization is immune from the impact of institutionalized racism, and we are committed to holding ourselves to the highest standards. We offer regular DEI trainings for our staff, board of directors, and teaching artists, and we are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of our organization.

Faces of RTA



ALUMNUS

John Zoccoli

"I thrived in RTA. By becoming comfortable with uncomfortable situations, the theater program pushed and challenged me to become better and better. RTA has been a springboard for the success I seek on the outside."



FAMILY MEMBER

Michelle Archer

"I thank RTA for standing by Jermaine and me during these tough times. RTA has lived up to the definition of *family...and we will always be family.*"



TEACHING ARTIST

Dr. Anderson Smith

"My experience as a literary citizen, creative writer, and facilitator, resonates with the unavoidable factor of human relations, and the need to connect, express, and interpret experience. In so doing, while engaging in dialogue, with our art, it provides an opportunity for people to learn from each other. For that, I am eternally grateful for RTA."



BOARD DIRECTOR

Que Newbill, JD

"I learned of RTA through BoardAssist, an organization that matches high-impact nonprofits with prospective Board candidates. After my initial conversations with other Board members, I knew I wanted to join and support RTA's mission and work. The rich passion and dedication of RTA's talented staff, alumni and fellow Board members continues to inspire me. I look forward to helping RTA build on its phenomenal track record of success."

Our Supporters

RTA is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

RTA is made possible through the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

RTA is proud to be a grantee of ArtsWestchester with funding made possible by Westchester County government with the support of County Executive George Latimer.

RTA is also indebted to the many generous foundations and individual donors whose support is so inspiring to our community.

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- Brian Fischer
- Elizabeth Gaynes
- Ann Gregg
- Clay Hiles
- Stephanie Lynn
- Julio Medina
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*As of 2021



Our Donors

RTA would not be the vital organization it is today without the generous support of our donors. We regret there is not enough space to list every name but we are grateful to all of our donors for their contributions in 2020.

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The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Judith O. and Robert E. Rubin

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SUSTAINING Making a monthly gift provides a steady stream of support for our work. These are the donors who have chosen to give every month.

Karin Almquist
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Jennifer Ringstad and Paul Meissner
Mauricio Rivera
Georgia and Jay Roelof
Gary Sloan
Andrea and Winthrop Wetherbee
David Zuluaga Martinez

Please contact us if there are omissions or corrections.

PCI/RTA Financials

Selected Statement of Financial Position

Cash Basis 12/31/2020

Full Financial Statements are available upon request

Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$991,139
Short-term investments	\$284,755
Fixed assets	\$8,437
Other Assets	\$1,400
Total Net Assets	\$1,285,731

Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$1,441
Deferred restricted grant revenue	\$612,830
Total Liabilities	\$614,271

Net Assets

Unrestricted	\$665,460
Temporarily restricted	\$6,000
Total net assets	\$671,460
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$1,285,731

Revenue and Other Support

Donations	\$376,975
Grants	\$480,278
Interest	\$10,417
Other	\$88,797
Total Revenue	\$956,467

Expenses

Increase in Unrestricted Net Assets	\$274,394
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Net Assets

Beginning of Year	\$397,066
End of year	\$671,460



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