

THE SHAKESPEARE PRISON PROJECT

Dr. Jonathan Shailor, Founder and Artistic Director

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

October 5, 2013

From 2004-2008, *The Shakespeare Prison Project* at Racine Correctional Institution (Sturtevant, Wisconsin) involved 44 inmates in an annual nine-month process of studying, rehearsing, and performing a Shakespeare play. An additional 600+ inmates attended the performances, and special performances were also given for the inmate actors' families.

The Shakespeare Prison Project received acclaim from inmate participants, their families, corrections personnel, formal external evaluators, and the media (including *The New York Times*). Representative testimony is included in this report.

A Dramatically Positive Impact on Institution Climate

In 2006, at the public performance of *Othello*, RCI Warden Robert Humphreys told *Wisconsin Public Radio* that

The inmates, during their performances, see that it takes nine months to prepare yourself and do this focus, and then, be able to perform like that. And I think it gives them a sense of, "I want to do something of that nature. I want to get involved with programs. I want to do things that are beneficial for me." I think that's where it resonates.

Institutional data on disciplinary reports also suggest a positive impact – not only on the 44 direct participants, but also the 600+ audience members, and the entire institution.

During the years of *The Shakespeare Project* (2004-2008), the total number of inmates at RCI (averaging 1,822) received an annual number of disciplinary reports averaging 3,433 - a factor of **1.92 per inmate**. However, **the factor for participants in *The Shakespeare Project* during that same period was 10 times lower than that for the general population: 0.18 disciplinary reports per inmate** (information from RCI Annual Reports (appended), and from additional research conducted under authorization of the Wisconsin DOC).

Also, the numbers suggest that *The Shakespeare Prison Project* may have had a broader institutional impact. In 2004, the year that the project began, inmates at

RCI received disciplinary reports by a factor of 2.25 per inmate. In the four subsequent years of the project's existence, the disciplinary report factor dropped every year: from 2.25 to 2.13 in 2005, then to 1.87 in 2006, 1.8 in 2007, and 1.54 in 2008. In the two years that immediately followed the cancellation of *The Shakespeare Prison Project*, the disciplinary report factor shot up: 1.54 to 2.85.

Impact on Recidivism

I have not yet been able to track the recidivism statistics for all inmates who participated in the program, and were then released. However, I am seeking that data. In the meantime, I have been in direct contact with 5 members of the project who have been released. All are doing well (employed, and/or in school, and in stable relationships), and all 5 have appeared with me at formal presentations at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, where they have told their stories, and performed monologues and scenes from Shakespeare.

For *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, the 19-year-old prison theatre program in Kentucky, the statistics are as follows:

The national recidivism average is 67%; the Kentucky recidivism rate is 29.5%; and the Shakespeare Behind Bars program at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex has a current recidivism rate of 6.1%. (retrieved 10-5-13 from <http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org/programs/kentucky/llcc/>)

And for *Prison Performing Arts* in Missouri: "The recidivism rate for men and women who have been involved in prison theater programs is less than one-third of the state's overall rate" (Agnes Wilcox, *The New York Times*, December 12, 2012).

The Shakespeare Prison Project:
Representative Testimony from Informed Observers & Evaluators

King Lear (2004-2005):

“My legacy is not going to be a crazy Vietnam veteran or a killer of women and children or a convict. My legacy is what I do with this from now on.”

Prisoner Ken Spears, 52, after nine months of participation in The Shakespeare Prison Project (quoted by Jodi Wilgoren in The New York Times, April 29, 2005)

"This is just a letter to applaud your efforts... As a long time prosecutor in Kenosha County, I think any good citizen who helps inmates take a look at the world from other eyes is playing an important role. I have long thought that part of the solution to crime is to make sure that those who commit crimes see the world from different points of view. What better way to do that than the theater?"

*Michael D. Graveley, Assistant District Attorney,
Kenosha County, 2005*

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“Hello humanity! Welcome back! I know first hand for certain we definitely left an overwhelmingly positive impression on both the staff and inmate population. It’s been over a week now and I’m still hearing compliments and congratulations. And the impression on my daughter’s face is forever etched in my heart, my mind and my soul. The whole nine month process was worth that smile from my daughter and my wife.” (inmate actor)

"It feels different to see him treated like a person up there." (his wife)

*The Racine Journal Times, 5-29-05 (front page story, banner headline)*

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I have read with interest about your production of King Lear. I was very moved by the effort and care that you have put into this production, and

have often thought about ways to bring art here, to Columbia. I just wanted to say thank you... In this climate we don't often recognize it, but art saves lives.

*Captain Lesly Winslow-Stanley, Columbia Correctional Institution,
Portage, WI*

Othello (2005-2006):

"The inmates, during their performances, see that it takes nine months to prepare yourself and do this focus, and then, be able to perform like that. And I think it gives them a sense of, "I want to do something of that nature. I want to get involved with programs. I want to do things that are beneficial for me." I think that's where it resonates."

*Robert Humphreys, Warden, Racine Correctional Institution, in an
interview for Wisconsin Public Radio, 2006*

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"It was stunning - Shakespeare as Shakespeare was meant to be - real, raw, and electrifying. The actor who played the lead had a powerful on-stage presence and emoted real anguish. Iago was positively machiavellian. And Desdemona made me cry. It was by far the most memorable performance of the play I have ever seen - truly transformative."

*Jean Feraca, host of Here on Earth: Radio Without Borders,  
Public Radio, 2006*

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The Tempest (2006-2007):

"As the Psychology Director for the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and as a former Psychological Supervisor at Racine Correctional, I have known and appreciated the work of Dr. Shailor since the mid-1990's... This is high drama as we witness not ordinary play-acting but a genuine healing encounter with the truth."

*Dr. Donald Hands, Director of Psychological Services, Wisconsin
Department of Corrections, 2007*

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"...I have been impressed by the amount of respect, dedication, and commitment that these incarcerated performers from a wide variety of geographic, racial, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds express for Jonathan and the creative work that they accomplish as a company of players. Indeed, I have been in awe of the rehearsal and production work that I have witnessed as a part of this program."

*Dr. Dean Yohnk, Chair and Artistic Director, UW-Parkside Theatre  
Arts Department, 2007*

"Thank you for all that you have done for the inmates... I look forward to seeing the performance... It truly has done more for the gentlemen involved that you will likely ever know."

*Christopher Hicks, English Department Chair, Waterford Union High  
School, relative of one of the inmate performers, 2007*

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"I personally enjoyed the play and was very impressed by the talent and dedication of the offenders. I am sure Dr. Shailor's dedication has influenced the offenders to discipline and work hard to present such an excellent performance. I have brought my AODA groups to all 3 Shakespeare plays, and they have benefitted enormously."

Mary Goldbeck, AODA Counselor, Racine Correctional Institution

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"I loved that the actors introduced their family members and loved seeing how the moment brought them so close and in such moving ways. I loved hearing the actors talk so personally about their lives, their parts in the play, the moments and lines that had resonated into their own lives, and the process of working with each other, sometimes against considerable odds, to arrive where they did."

*Buzz Alexander, Thurnau Professor of English Literature, and  
Founder, the Prison Creative Arts Project, University of  
Michigan*

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Julius Caesar (2007-2008):

"Cedric Lacy, who plays Decius and was convicted of cocaine possession, says the experience showed him "a world of different life out there... My favorite line is when Caesar says he is as constant as the Northern Star. When you are trying to achieve a goal, just stay constant.""

Jeanette Hurt, Wisconsin Trails Magazine, 2008

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"George told us that the project helped him to look past other people's differences. He stood up, and came to the front of the room as if to underline the importance of what he was about to say. "As many of you know, I had a very hard time accepting Lewis this year. [Lewis is gay.] I mean, I was a mean motherf\*\*ker to him, and I'm not proud of that fact. In fact, I feel like a piece of shit for having treated him that way. Because of my background, it's very difficult to accept someone like Lewis, but I have learned to accept him. I've learned to see him not for *what* he is, but for *who* he is. I consider him my friend." Then George walked over to Lewis and put his arms around him. The rest of the men applauded. I heard someone say, "You'll never see that on the yard.""

*Annual Shakespeare Project Evaluation and Celebration, Racine Correctional Institution, 2008*

**Hamlet (2012): Request to Renew the Shakespeare Project**

I worked with Jonathan on it and experienced first hand the positive effects.

*Jean Thieme, former Education Director, Racine Correctional Institution*

I have attended The Shakespeare Project and was incredibly impressed with the commitment of the men to producing a heart-felt and high-quality show. Their ability to memorize and articulate the text demonstrated their acquired dedication to hard work and to each other as an ensemble. Participating in this kind of skill-building work translates into lower recidivism as men learn to value setting and achieving goals.

*Meade Palidofsky, founder and artistic director, Storycatchers Theatre (serving incarcerated youth in the Illinois State Department of Corrections for over 25 years)*

I have been directing plays by Shakespeare, Sophocles and other playwrights with inmates at three Missouri prisons for over 20 years. The Missouri DOC has been extremely supportive of our work, which makes it not only possible, but encouraged. The recidivism rate for inmates who have participated in our programs is less than one fifth of the DOC rate.

Programs like The Shakespeare Project in Wisconsin are cheap, intellectually challenging and proven effective.

*Agnes Wilcox, founder and artistic director, Prison Performing Arts,  
St. Louis, Missouri*

**APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RCI CONDUCT REPORTS 2004-2012\***

| <u>YEAR</u>   | <u>POPULATION</u> | <u>MONTHLY / %</u>   | <u>FISCAL / %</u>       |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2004          | 1,601             | 300 / 19%            | 3602 / 225%             |
| 2005          | 1,889             | 317 / 17%            | 3802 / 213%             |
| 2006          | 1,889             | 294 / 16%            | 3528 / 187%             |
| 2007          | 1,889             | 284 / 15%            | 3404 / 180%             |
| 2008          | 1,840             | 236 / 13%            | 2829 / 154%             |
| 2009          | 1,832             | 236 / 13%            | 2829 / 154%             |
| 2010          | 1,837             | 436 / 24%            | 5233 / 285%             |
| 2011          | 1,826             | 350 / 19%            | 4198 / 230%             |
| 2012          | 1,842             | 309 / 17%            | 3705 / 201%             |
| 2004-<br>2008 | 9,108<br>(1822)   | 1,431 / 16%<br>(286) | 13,665 / 150%<br>(2733) |

\*from Racine Correctional Institution's Annual Reports (published on line) (2004-2012)