



CAN ART
CHANGE
THE WORLD?
FOUNDATION



2025
TEHACHAPI FILM SCREENING
PROGRAM REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey revealed unprecedented engagement, with **87% of participants expressing strong interest in future art projects**. This response was exceptional, particularly since many of the participants had never heard of JR prior to the screening.

Many participants articulated how they would like to **use artistic expression not only for personal transformation but also to give back to their communities**, particularly by working with youth to prevent incarceration. The strong emotional responses (frequently using words like "hope," "inspired," and "change") indicate that the documentary **resonated deeply** with the incarcerated residents and **sparked interest in creative engagement** as a pathway to rehabilitation and reconnection with society.

The documentary, which began as a simple screening, served **as a mirror for self-reflection, a window of hope, and a catalyst for imagining new possibilities** both inside and outside the prison walls.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2019 and 2022, French artist JR and his team carried out a series of powerful art interventions at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, a supermax prison in Southern California. Developed in close collaboration with incarcerated individuals and prison staff, these projects sought to humanize those within the prison system and foster a sense of connection and community in an environment often marked by isolation and division.

In his debut feature-length documentary, *Tehachapi* (2024), JR captures the making of these projects and reveals how art can serve as a catalyst for dialogue, reflection, and transformation within carceral spaces.

One year later, JR returned to Tehachapi to screen the film for the incarcerated men—some of whom had actively participated in the projects depicted. This report explores the impact of that screening on the prison population, examining how seeing their stories represented on screen influenced their perspectives, relationships, and sense of agency.

THE TEHACHAPI PROJECT'S TIMELINE

2019 | *The Yard*: JR receives permission to work with 28 residents of the Tehachapi prison. He photographs them, records their personal stories, and assembles them into a monumental pasting covering the prison yard

2022 | *Inside Out*: JR's Inside Out Photobooth truck rolls into Facility C, allowing over 400 men to have their portraits taken. These larger-than-life images are then collectively pasted on the inner walls of the yard, giving participants a platform to share their identities and stories.

2023-2024 | *Documentary Release*: The *Tehachapi* film premieres at the 2023 Telluride Film Festival and is released nationwide in French theaters in June 2024. It is now available for streaming worldwide on MasterClass.

2020 | *Mountains*: In his second visit, JR collaborates with incarcerated volunteers to paste a black-and-white image of the Tehachapi Mountains onto the inner wall of the prison courtyard. This installation aims to bring the obstructed natural view into the prison, offering a sense of openness and connection to the outside world.

2022 | *Picnic*: JR organizes a communal picnic in the Facility C yard. Incarcerated individuals, correctional officers, and JR's team share a meal around a tarp featuring the eyes of Ruett, a man who lost his son to gang violence and now works to help incarcerated men turn their lives around.

2025 | *Screening at Tehachapi*: JR and his team go back to Tehachapi for two screenings in the facility.



CONTEXT

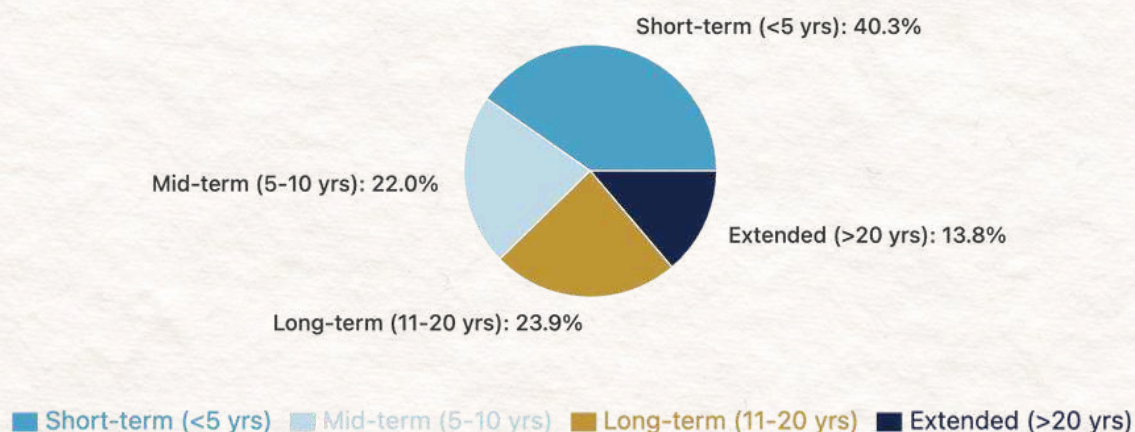
In February 2025, a survey was shared with the incarcerated population at the Tehachapi facility following the *Tehachapi* screening.

The survey was designed to assess both the level of interest in the program and its perceived effectiveness, while also exploring the range of emotions it evoked in participants.

A total of **159 incarcerated residents participated in the survey**, with English as the predominant language spoken. The questions included a mix of Yes/No responses, scaled ratings from 1 to 10, and open-ended written answers.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

AMOUNT OF TIME INCARCERATED TO DATE



Shortest : 4 months - Longest : 47 years - Average : 12 years

SELF-DESCRIPTION

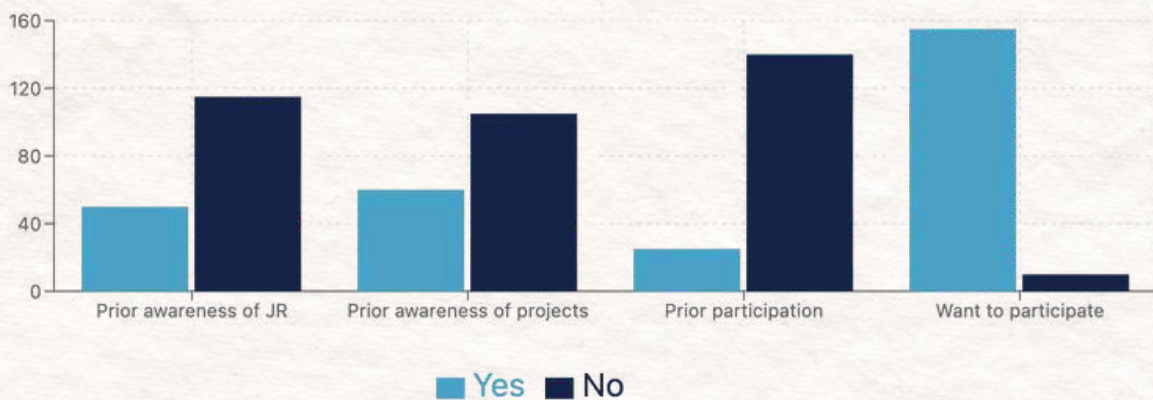
Notable findings:

- Very few respondents used negative self-descriptors
- Many emphasized spiritual, religious, or moral attributes
- **A significant number positioned themselves as being in a process of change or rehabilitation**



ARTISTIC IDENTITY & PROJECT PARTICIPATION

- **87% of participants express strong interest** in participating in future art projects
- This high interest exists despite only 30.8% being previously aware of JR's work
- Only 15.1% had previously participated in art project.



Surprising Findings on Artistic Identity:

Artistic self-identification decreases significantly as incarceration time increases.

Individuals with longer sentences (20+ years) were 34% less likely to identify as artistic compared to short-term residents.

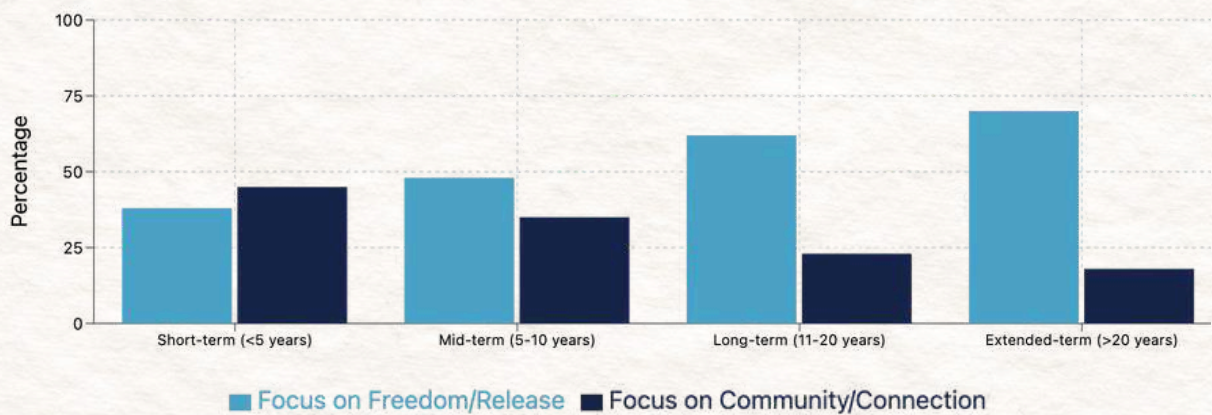
PERSPECTIVE BASED ON TIME SERVED

The longer an individual had been incarcerated, the more he focused on moments of **release and freedom** in the film (68% for extended-term vs. 38% for short-term).

Conversely, **incarcerated people serving shorter time periods** showed significantly more interest in **community connection aspects**. This suggests a psychological shift in priorities based on incarceration duration.

Focus on Freedom vs. Community in Film Responses

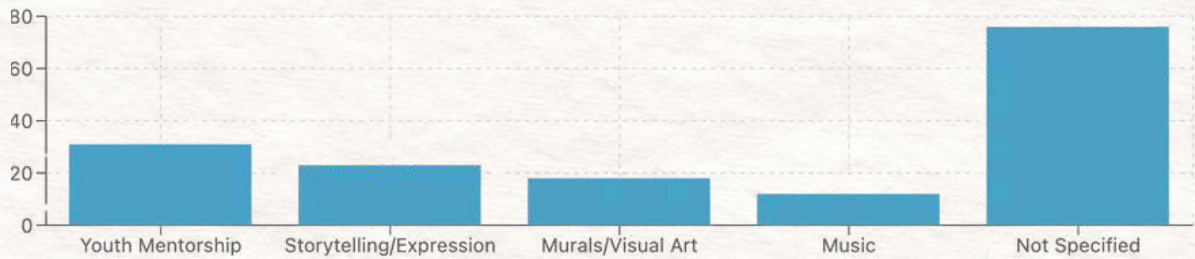
(Percentage of inmates mentioning each theme)



COMMUNITY IMPACT IDEAS

The most common themes for community impact through art were:

- **Youth Mentorship (31 responses)** - Many inmates specifically mentioned working with at-risk youth or in juvenile facilities.
- **Storytelling/Expression (23 responses)** - Using personal narratives to prevent others from making similar mistakes.
- **Murals/Visual Art (18 responses)** - Creating public art that transforms spaces, similar to JR's approach.
- **Music-Based Programs (12 responses)** - Using music for healing and expression.



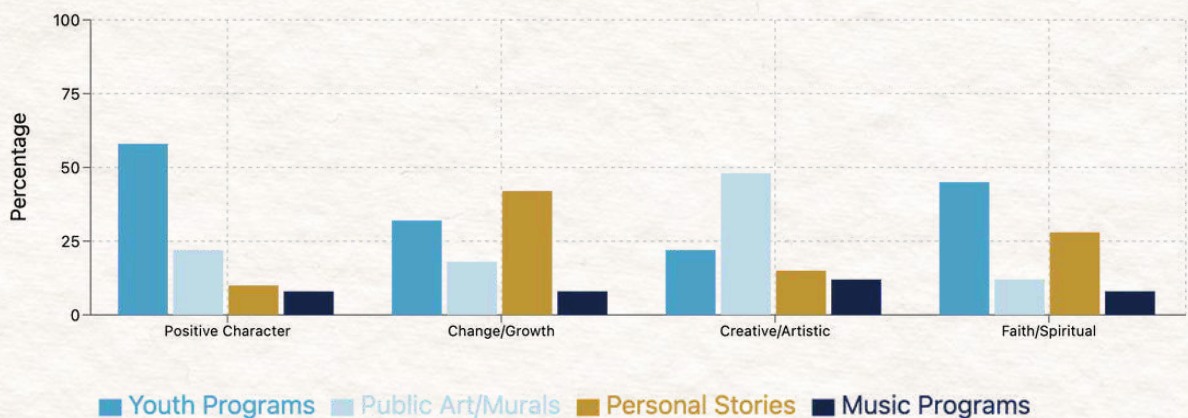
Youth mentorship was the most common idea (31 responses), followed by storytelling/expression (23) and murals/visual art (18).

SELF-DESCRIPTION PATTERNS INFLUENCES COMMUNITY IMPACT IDEAS

The analyses revealed fascinating correlations between how participants described themselves and their ideas for community art impact:

Community Art Impact Ideas by Self-Description

(Percentage distribution within each self-description category)



Surprising Finding : Individuals with **longer incarceration periods (10+ years)** often had **more reflective, rehabilitation-focused art proposals**, suggesting a deeper personal transformation journey.



FROM THE PARTICIPANTS



"There is still hope and a path..."

*"I want to make change happen
and outside (I want to) be a
better father, son, and person –
and do right in the community."*

*"Anything is possible if we do
what it takes, do the right
thing, stay positive."*

"It could happen to me..."

"Change is now!"

"Thank you for believing in us!"

*"I want to thank you all for coming
back and giving us hope."*

*"I want to give back to the
ones I've hurt in any way
possible."*

***"Art is and always will be the path for change.
I would like to see more programs in art,
music, creative writing."***

*"I'm glad to be here...to see
the beauty of humanity."*

*"I am extremely grateful for
today and for the energy JR
and his crew...and for the
message they leave us with."*

CONCLUSION

JR's Tehachapi projects and resulting documentary exemplifies the profound power of art to foster connection, transformation, and hope within even the most restrictive environment of a maximum security prison in Tehachapi, California. The overwhelmingly positive response from residents, as seen in 87% of survey participants expressing the highest level of interest in joining the project, speaks to the deep resonance and significance of the work. For many, the screening served as their first introduction to JR's vision, yet the emotional and aspirational impact was immediate and lasting. By centering the voices and experiences of incarcerated individuals through collaborative art and storytelling, this program continues to challenge perceptions, build community, and inspire personal growth and societal reintegration. With sentiments of hope, change, and inspiration being apparent following the screening, this was not just a look back at what has been accomplished, but a renewed invitation for transformation moving forward.



CONTACT

If you're interested in hosting a screening of *Tehachapi*, starting an art project inside a prison, or finding ways to support creative initiatives within the justice system, we'd love to connect. For more information about JR, the Prison Art Project, or the *Can Art Change The World?* Foundation, please contact hello@canartchangetheworld.net.

