



HEAR FROM HER

Murphy Anne Carter

System Impacted Women Speak Series
Brought to you by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition

One of the first problems that I would change would be the parole system. How many women I see come back, even after a few months of having left, is shocking. You can read about recidivism rates until the cows come home, and not really comprehend it until you see the look on someone's face when you see them back inside.

Moments of inspiration occur daily, and I say this a lot, because it touches me but, in every class, at least one person cries, and in every class, we all laugh. That's one of things that keeps me going back—that real connection and candor that transforms a group of people into a community.

People in the community, talking about changes and motivated to incur them, have no backing, no support, and if they did, so much of this work could begin. We have the perfect recidivist machine, and we have tools to retrofit it, to change it, and people who know how and are willing to do so. The two just need to come together.



Note: Murphy is the co-director of the Freehand Arts Project, a non-profit dedicated to bringing creative arts classes to those incarcerated in Texas jails and prisons. The program strives to address the deep wounds found in the incarceration system by providing a safe avenue for self-reflection, the opportunity to develop emotional awareness, and a supportive community. The classes give inmates the experience of control and introspection through art, allowing them to engage in the world more confidently and authentically.



Can you talk about the women you serve?

The women I serve range in age. I've taught individuals who are still teenagers, and women who are grandmothers. While everyone's story is different, and the details of their past and backgrounds vary, a few commonalities appear again and again. First, that many of the women are mothers, and second, that many of the charges against these individuals deal with drugs. However, this is all empirical observation. We do not explicitly ask background questions, personal history, or facts about their case.

The stories I learn about emerge largely from the writing the women produce, about life on the inside and the outside, both the dreams and nightmares that have led to their current circumstances. I have read poetry written by a mother afraid her daughter will forget her face, a daughter worried about the meals and housekeeping, the dishes piling up in the sink or the clothes being ironed in the morning, and essays about the demons of drugs, voices coming to get you with a spoon.

For more information about women in Texas' criminal justice system, visit TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice