

MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

2017 Media Impact Festival Case Study: *The Work* <https://theworkmovie.com>

Film synopsis:

Set entirely inside Folsom State Prison, *The Work* follows three men during four days of intensive group therapy with convicts, revealing an intimate and powerful portrait of authentic human transformation that transcends what we think of as rehabilitation. Each man in the room takes his turn at delving deep and sharing something personal. The raw and revealing process that the incarcerated men undertake rips them out of their comfort zones and forces them to see themselves and each other in unexpected ways. *The Work* offers a powerful and rare look past the cinderblock walls, steel doors and dehumanizing tropes of prison culture.

The Work profiles a one-of-a-kind program run by the Inside Circle Foundation (ICF), which was created by inmates and ex-convicts and is dedicated to the personal growth of men in prison. The ICF provides emotional literacy and behavioral change training through weekly support groups and helps inmates create environments where they can safely work through the issues that have prevented them from living up to their full potential as human beings. By drawing audiences in through dramatic, intimate personal narratives of inmates and volunteers from the outside, *The Work* humanizes the people too often described by statistics alone and creates a surprising level of audience empathy, understanding and connection among viewers and the subjects in the film. *The Work's* social engagement campaign aims to support audiences to connect with the inmates in the film, to reduce “otherness,” and mobilize supporters to take actions that will help strengthen criminal justice reform efforts locally and nationally.

Production team:

- Jairus McLeary and Gethin Aldous, Directors
- Alice Henty McLeary, Jairus McLeary, Miles McLeary & Eon McLeary, Producers
- Amy Foote, Editor
- Su Patel, Impact Producer

Funders:

The production was funded entirely through private donors and investors connected to the filmmakers. Outreach and impact fundraising is in progress with interest from various organizations but no commitments to date.

Issues addressed in film:

- Rehabilitation as a means to reducing violence in prison as well as the recidivism rate
- Mass incarceration
- Racial justice
- Toxic masculinity

Target audience:

- General audiences
- Inmates, prison administrators and corrections officers
- Criminal justice activists and reformers
- High-risk youth and those who work with them
- Faith-based people, community members and others involved with the criminal justice system (police, social workers etc.)
- Policymakers and influencers

Impact goals:

The impact goals are to:

- Inspire discussion and engagement among the public to reduce bias and increase understanding of those who have been or are incarcerated;
- Increase awareness of the value of and need for rehabilitative services in prisons and in at-risk programs;
- Seed opportunities to implement therapeutic programs in correctional facilities and programs working with at-risk youth; and
- Increase volunteerism in prison rehabilitation programs.

Impact strategy (for 2018, pending funding):

- Holding brain-trust screening to identify key partners;
- Hosting high-impact community screenings that include conversations with the subjects in the film who are no longer incarcerated;
- Developing a toolkit for other rehabilitation programs in order to expand the program into other prisons;
- Launching a college and university tour; and
- Embarking on a conference tour.

Impact so far:

The recent racist rally and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as the exposure of toxic masculinity in entertainment, government, and society more broadly has increased interest in *The Work*. As a result, the team is working on a college screening tour for 2018 and hopes to expand work with supporters at criminal justice organizations such as Vera Institute for Justice, the Bureau of Justice, and the ACLU (pending funding). Outreach screenings planned for 2018 will include events with Cut 50, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc., MIT Center for Civic Media, Institute of Transformative Mentoring at the New School for Social Research, and a screening in partnership with Yale University's film school, law school and medical departments. Meanwhile, the team continues to expand its efforts to bring the film to prisons (pending funding and with lead partner the Inside Circle Foundation), as a result of positive screenings at Folsom State prison (both for inmates and for the administration), the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Association of State Correctional Administrators. Interest from these groups was particularly strong and offers the outreach support needed to further expand *The Work* program in California.

The film has been screened at festivals including:

- SXSW 2017 (Grand Jury Prize winner for Best Feature Documentary)
- Sheffield Docfest 2017 (Audience Award for Best Feature Documentary)

- Seattle International Film Festival 2017
- San Francisco Doc/Fest 2017
- AFI Film Festival 2017
- BAM CinemaFest 2017
- Traverse City Film Festival 2017 (Gala screenings)
- Sarajevo Film Festival 2017
- Bergen International Film Festival 2017
- Vancouver Film Festival 2017
- Busan Film Festival 2017
- DTLA Film Festival 2017 (Grand Jury Prize winner for Best Feature Documentary)
- American Film Festival in Poland 2017 (Audience Award for Best Feature Documentary)
- Hamptons International Film Festival 2017
- Camden International Film Festival 2017 (Nominated for Harrell Award)
- Chicago Film Festival 2017
- IDFA Best of Fests 2017

It was also nominated for Best Feature Documentary at the Gotham Awards, and for Unforgettable Characters at Cinema Eye Honors.

Audience reactions have been positive, with quotes including, “See this film. And prepare to be changed”; “Extraordinary, moving, thought provoking and powerful”; and “One of the most overwhelmingly heartbreaking and powerful documentaries I have ever seen.”

The film has also been featured in the press, with quotes including:

- “*The Work* will change how you think about prison.” (No Film School)
- “If Americans want to stop the prison-industrial complex from profiting off the imprisonment of fellow citizens, then they should watch *The Work* to understand how beneficial rehabilitation can be.” (FEE.org)
- “Captures masculinity at its most innocent and leads to profound displays of compassion.” (Roger Ebert)
- “The most powerful group therapy session ever caught on camera.” (Indiewire)
- “*The Work* builds cases for prison programs that breaks inmates down.” (*Texas Observer*)
- “Say what you will about prison’s capacity to reform... *The Work* is working.” (*Variety*)
- “*The Work* forces us to take a look at masculinity, the prison system and how we expect men to cope with trauma.” (The Young Folks)