EDUCATION

Formerly incarcerated fathers write and perform play about the justice system



Carla Javier January 24, 2018

A group of formerly incarcerated fathers are bringing their

experiences to the stage with a show they wrote called "A Man Like

Me."

At a recent rehearsal in Atwater Village, one of the actors asked why they had to sit so close together for a scene set in jail.

the bed," 54-year-old Derrick Hill told him, remembering his own experiences behind bars.

That's the point of the play: to help people who have been incarcerated transition

from inside of prison to outside and share their experiences. The collaboration

"We'd be talking and people would always try to come up and hang on the end of

received a Re-Entry Through the Arts Grant from the California Arts Council. To receive one of the pilot program's grants, programs had to show they would

"help inmates transition from incarceration back into their communities and

being incarcerated ." For Hill, the experience has been difficult.

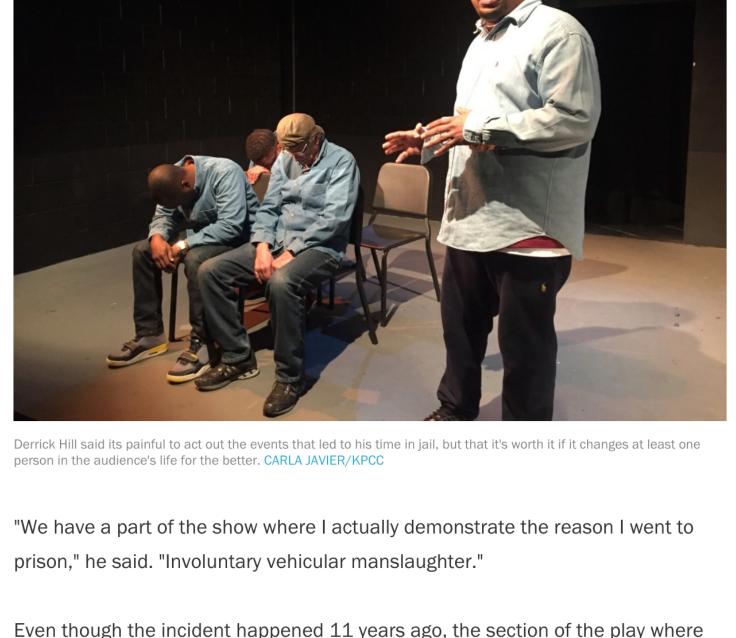
prevent those on probation, parole, or post-release community supervision from

crash is still hard for him.

From the performance:

told I had a warrant.

brings up that moment again," Hill explained.



the other three actors sit as if in a car as he narrates the events leading up to the

The doctor said, "It's not your fault, man, he was drunk."

Two years later, around my daughter's birthday, I got pulled over and was

When I found out the driver's wife had died I went into shock.

and after, too. "You never know who you're going to touch," Hill said.

"Every time I even talk about it or say it in the play or rehearse it or read it, it just

But, he said, it's important to do if it helps people understand life behind bars -

Derrick Hill and Kentrell Antoine act out a scene in "A Man Like Me" where men in jail read and write letters to loved ones outside. CARLA JAVIER/KPCC Another participant in the program, Kentrell Antoine, had never acted before, but he said he hopes stakeholders watch and reflect on the show's themes. "I want everybody: preachers, judges, lawyers, producers," said Antoine. "I want all of them to watch it so they can feel the effect of what we've been through." Susie Tanner, of TheaterWorkersProject, collaborated with teaching artists,

shows. She said she thinks people like the formerly incarcerated men she worked with are unfairly judged by society. "They're seen as less than. They're seen as people who are throwaways," Tanner

Friends Outside in Los Angeles County, and Dads Back! Academy to put on the

believe every human being should have the right to redefine their story." Empowering them to share their experiences through theater was one way to do

this. Tanner said.

said. "I'm a firm believer in restorative justice. I believe in second chances, and I

Hill, who was involved in theater in his youth, hopes that by the end of the show,

"You have two actually convicted convicts, and you have two guys acting," he said. "And at the end, I want you to look at all four of us like we're the same."

the audiences see the incarcerated men as regular people.