

# CHANGING THE STORYTELLERS



PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

2025

IMPACT REPORT

## OVERVIEW

# 2025 was the year PJP's work came into full view.

Five years ago, PJP began with a simple belief: the people who are most affected by the prison system should be the ones telling its stories. What started as a publication has grown into something larger — a hub for lived-experience journalism that is changing how the country understands incarceration.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'Y' and 'K'.

**Yukari Kane**  
Co-founder & CEO, Prison Journalism Project

This year made that clearer than ever. Our writers reached broader audiences, earned recognition, and brought depth to conversations that rarely include people living inside the system. At the same time, more incarcerated people, including many who had never written before, found pathways into journalism through our training programs, strengthening skills that build confidence, agency, and opportunity.

The impact is visible not only in the stories, but also in the community of writers who are finding their voice, their craft, and their place in the wider conversations about life in the prison legal system and the world beyond prison walls — and drawing readers in with stories that build connection.

As we mark our five-year anniversary, we're looking ahead with even greater clarity. In the coming year, we will deepen our literacy integration, increase access through tablet learning, expand opportunities for incarcerated women, and reimagine our publication so it better reflects the full arc of the prison experience, all while continuing to publish powerful, nuanced stories that broaden public understanding.

## GROWING NATIONAL REACH

More than

350,000

new and returning readers to the website, and

10,000+

newsletter subscribers

National visibility via co-publications with national outlets such as The Guardian, USA Today, The Marshall Project, Reckon News, Public Source and Minnesota Reformer.

PJP Inside's readership has more than quadrupled to

8,200+

per issue through our partnership with the prison tablet education platform Edovo.

PJP Inside is also available in print in **345** prison libraries across **42** states.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SURGE



PJP's Bluesky audience grew **83%** to **27,280** since the beginning of the year



LinkedIn grew **14%** to **6,500**



Instagram followers increased nearly **25%** to **6,712**



Prison Journalism Project's posts on Reddit have been viewed more than **1.3 million** times.

2,500 +

Stories in our archive

800 +

Writers

44

States  
(incl. D.C.)

238

Stories in 2025

A hand holding a pen over a document, with a teal overlay.

"AN OP-ED I WROTE RECENTLY ABOUT  
MY QUEST FOR COMMUTATION WAS PUBLISHED  
IN THE MORNING CALL THIS WEEK.

I NEVER WOULD HAVE HAD THE COURAGE  
TO PUT MYSELF OUT THERE IN SUCH A VULNERABLE  
WAY IF NOT FOR EVERYTHING I'VE BEEN  
LEARNING THROUGH PJP."

— Jamie in Pennsylvania



## ELEVATING INCARCERATED VOICES

- PJP writers won 11 Stillwater Awards.
- Added 57 new writers from 21 states including Arkansas, Illinois, California, Oklahoma, Michigan, Alabama, Louisiana and New Mexico.
- Published special projects and timely stories on topics such as “What Extreme Cold Feels Like in Prison,” the five-year anniversary of George Floyd’s murder and NY’s wildcat strike.
- PJP writers published stories directly with The Marshall Project, Al Jazeera English, The Humanist, The New York Times, The Morning Call and others.
- Forty-five writers are part of PJP’s virtual chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, the first national chapter for incarcerated journalists.



## Stillwater Awards

Presented by



## A WRITER'S JOURNEY

# Few stories capture the arc of PJP's impact better than that of Tariq MaQbool.

He began writing with us in our earliest days and has since published more than 30 stories on PJP.

His work has also appeared in Al Jazeera English, Rolling Stone, and The Marshall Project. Today, he serves as an advisor for PJP, mentors other writers inside New Jersey State Prison and maintains [captivevoices.com](https://captivevoices.com), where he shares his and other writers' work — expanding the reach of lived-experience journalism from behind bars.

**As a Muslim prisoner in the US, I worry I will be cremated when I die**

*I will likely die in prison, but before I do, myself and other prisoners want a process to ensure Islamic burial rites.*

**"I Can't Breathe": An Anthology of Racism**

LIFE INSIDE

## How I Keep Hope Alive While Serving 150 Years in Prison

*In those moments when I feel like a puppet tied up in strings, I draw on my Muslim faith to stay hopeful.*



## After COVID Outbreak at New Jersey State Prison, Prisoners Fear "The Dungeon"

by **TARIQ MAQBOOL** August 22, 2022

## COVID-19 Fears Return to New Jersey State Prison



by **TARIQ MAQBOOL**  
August 16, 2021

ESSAYS & MEMOIRS, PERSPECTIVE

## Endurance: My 16 Years Inside Prison

“One of our officers came to work angry... The way he was speaking to us ... and the tone he was using felt devaluing. I was HEATED and wanted to match his energy 2.0. But I saw everything that I have worked so hard to become flash before my eyes. Leading the vision was PJP and the reputation and rapport I am building with people regarding journalism. Instead of matching him, I chose to blast my music and go on about my day. Later it dawned on me: The ethics, professionalism and training PJP requires us to develop and practice are ultimately transferred into our daily lives and determine the choices we make today.”

— Lucretia in New Jersey

## EXPANDING LEARNING PROGRAMS

- Launched Learning+, a three-year training and publishing progression, enrolling 49 writers, including 24 women. First-assignment completion rates were 80%.
- Prison education programs and partners in 12 states used “A Prison Writer’s Guide to Media Writing” to teach journalism.
- Created a train-the-trainer guide to accompany “A Prison Writer’s Guide to Media Writing.”
- Partnered with Poetic Justice at two Oklahoma women’s prisons to offer a summer course on opinion writing. Stories have so far been published in Tulsa World and The Guardian.



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## LITERACY & SKILL BUILDING IMPACT

Our literacy gains come directly from how we teach journalism. Structured assignments — from fill-in-the-blank templates to guided reporting projects — make reporting accessible while reinforcing core skills in reading, organizing and writing.

>90%

Percentage of writers in  
PJP's certification program  
who improved two grade  
levels or more in literacy.\*

*\*These are writers who completed the first of three courses  
in the handbook certification program.*

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## RECOGNITION & INFLUENCE

In 2025, PJP's work gained meaningful national visibility. Our team presented at major journalism and education conferences — including SXSW EDU, Investigative Reporters and Editors, the South Asian Journalists Association, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison — reflecting growing recognition of lived-experience journalism as a tool for literacy, civic engagement and public understanding.

Our special project on “[Summer Heat in Prison](#)” from 2024 gained national traction, earning finalist honors from the Online Journalism Awards, LION Publishers and Poynter, and drew inquiries from policymakers and advocacy organizations.

"I ALWAYS FIND MYSELF AS A STRONG VOICE  
FOR WHAT IS RIGHT INSIDE HERE,  
BUT TO EXPAND THAT OUT  
MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME."

— Derek in New Jersey



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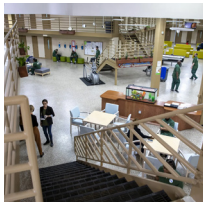
## STORYTELLING THAT MOVES THE NEEDLE



[“What It’s Like to Have Your Period in Prison”](#) by Kelsey Dodson, copublished with The Guardian.



Jorge Alvarado’s [“I’m Fighting for My Freedom Using Outdated Technology”](#) went viral via Hacker News and was shared globally.



Jamie Mancuso’s [“The Progressive Scandinavian Prison Model Comes to an Idaho Prison”](#) received interest from other DOCs.

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## WRITERS’ IMPACT BEYOND PJP

- New York writer Darrell Powell’s essay “I’m Watching the Knicks’ Playoff Run from Prison” was included in “The Year’s Best Sports Writing 2025” anthology.
- Florida writer Kimberly Cannon won PEN America’s Bell Chevigny Award in Women’s Nonfiction.
- Idaho writer Patrick Irving was named as one of the inaugural members of PEN America’s Incarcerated Writers Bureau.
- PJP alumni and incarcerated advisor Tariq MaQbool published a three-part series on the U.S. justice system, prison hustles and prison education for Al Jazeera English.
- PJP alumni Ryan Moser is working as a freelance journalist and a communications consultant in Philadelphia, including writing participant profiles for the Center for Employment Opportunities.



"MY YOUNGEST SON, WHOM I HAVE NOT SEEN  
SINCE HE WAS 8 AND HAVE NOT TALKED TO IN OVER  
A DECADE, REACHED OUT TO RECONNECT WITH ME.  
I CREDIT THE PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT  
BECAUSE WHEN HE SEARCHED ME ON THE INTERNET  
MY ARTICLES CAME UP."

— Jeff in Washington state

## 2026 PRIORITIES

- **Expand access to journalism-based literacy and workforce training** so more incarcerated people nationwide can strengthen core communication skills through tablet-based video courses, Learning+, and a new literacy assessment we intend to develop.
- **Bring more writers into the pipeline** by broadening participation across literacy levels and creating simpler, more inclusive entry points into both learning and publishing.
- **Advance our Women First commitment** by growing dedicated pathways for incarcerated women and launching a special project that elevates their experiences in a system built for men.
- **Redesign our publication to make the prison journey clearer and more accessible**, helping families, educators, advocates and communities better understand the end-to-end experience of incarceration.
- **Deepen engagement with the audiences most connected to this work** — formerly incarcerated writers, families, and their supporters — while building a stronger base of loyal readers.

Together, these priorities aim to shift public understanding of incarceration, inform policy conversations, and create stronger pathways for literacy, confidence and workforce readiness.

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## HOW TO SUPPORT

When you support PJP, you invest in incarcerated writers' ability to build skills, publish credible reporting, and contribute to a more informed public conversation about incarceration. You can help by:



Making a [tax-deductible gift](#) and becoming a PJP member



Subscribing to our [weekly newsletter](#)  
The Inside Story



Partnering with us on  
training or editorial  
initiatives



Sharing our work with  
your networks

To learn more, we invite you to contact us at  
[yukari@prisonjournalismproject.org](mailto:yukari@prisonjournalismproject.org) or visit [our website](#).