

# PROOF OF LIFE

2026 National Crime Victims' Rights Week — In-Prison Forum

## FORUM EVALUATION REPORT

California Institution for Men (CIM), Facility C • Chino, CA • April 21, 2026  
Restoration & Resilience Alliance (R&RA)

### Executive Summary

On April 21, 2026, in honor of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, the first cohort of the Proof of Life program hosted an In-Prison Forum at California Institution for Men (CIM), Facility C, in Chino, California. This event was the culminating experience of a 52-session restorative justice education program, co-facilitated by the first Proof of Life cohort and the Restoration & Resilience Alliance (R&RA).

Thirty-nine (39) evaluation surveys were collected from attendees spanning three groups: community members from outside the prison, Proof of Life and inside community members, as well as CIM/CDCR staff. Respondents rated six forum elements on a 1-to-5 Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Results were overwhelmingly positive.

4.54 / 5

Overall Mean Rating  
across all 6 elements

92.5%

Agree or Strongly Agree  
of all scored responses

39

Surveys Completed  
from 3 respondent groups

The forum was praised for its depth, authenticity, and human impact. Written comments consistently reflected **belief in the capacity of incarcerated people to change, strong appreciation for the program, and desire to see it expanded.**

### Section 1 — Event Overview

The 2026 NCVRW In-Prison Forum was designed around the central question at the heart of Proof of Life: How can incarcerated people demonstrate their rehabilitation—and their genuine accountability to those they have harmed?

The forum featured six structured elements:

- Welcome and grounding overview by Nora Jacob (R&RA Executive Director)
- Listening Circle Part One — Repairing harm: What can incarcerated people do?
- Listening Circle Part Two — Reintegration: Community voice and what returning to the community looks like
- Personal testimony by James Menefield (former Proof of Life participant, CSULA student, and R&RA Treasurer)
- Open Q&A between attendees and incarcerated participants
- Closing remarks by Allen Plumb, Proof of Life co-founder

Each element was designed to bridge the divide between inside and outside communities, creating space for honest conversation about accountability, repair, and the paths forward.

## Section 2 — About Proof of Life

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Proof of Life began with a question posed by Matthew Toerner, an incarcerated man at CIM’s Facility C: “What do people on the outside wonder about when someone they love is incarcerated for many years?”

*“Imagine what happens when someone is held for ransom. The negotiators demand ‘proof of life’ before the person taken into captivity is released. In the same way, these students are asking for themselves: How can we show ‘proof of life’—of our own lives—becoming more accountable, responsible, and respectful?”*

Matthew Toerner, Allen Plumb, and Ryan Faith approached R&RA officers Karly Giacalone and Nora Jacob with a proposal: a 52-session, in-depth restorative justice class to explore three core questions:

- How can we demonstrate our rehabilitation?
- How might we offer amends and seek repair with those harmed by our crimes—or indirectly, with others harmed in similar ways?
- How can we best return to our communities, if the Board of Parole Hearings finds us suitable?

The program was established with the institutional support of CIM Community Resources Manager Angela Wirth and former Yard Lieutenant Brad Heimer. The 2026 In-Prison Forum was conceived from the start as the program’s culminating experience—an invitation to the outside world to witness the work.

## Section 3 — Survey Methodology

Forum evaluation surveys were distributed to all attendees at the conclusion of the event. The survey asked respondents to rate six forum elements using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree through 5 = Strongly Agree), identify their role (community member, CIM/CDCR staff, or Proof of Life inside participant), and share any written comments.

Surveys were collected in paper form and later scanned. Rating data was extracted using optical character recognition (OCR) applied to scanned images of each form. Due to variations in handwriting and scan quality, a small number of individual item responses could not be determined with certainty and are excluded from item-level averages. Averages and percentages reflect all legible responses.

**Total surveys collected: 39**    **Total scored responses: 213** across 6 items

## Section 4 — Respondent Profile

The 39 respondents represented three distinct communities, reflecting the cross-sector nature of the event:

Respondent Type	Count	Percentage
Community	32	82.1%
Inside	5	12.8%
CIM/CDCR Staff	1	2.6%
Not identified	1	2.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>

The strong community member turnout (82.1%) demonstrates that this event successfully drew outside stakeholders—advocates, community members, and potential allies—into direct dialogue with the Proof of Life cohort. The participation of inside members as survey respondents also reflects their investment in the program’s evaluation.

## Section 5 — Survey Findings: Quantitative Results

### 5.1 Overall Results

Across all six forum elements and all respondent types:

- Overall mean score: 4.54 out of 5.0
- 92.5% of all responses were Agree or Strongly Agree
- 74% of all responses were Strongly Agree
- No forum element scored below 4.42

### 5.2 Results by Forum Element

Forum Element	Mean	Agree + SA	Strongly Agree	n
Nora Jacob's welcome & overview	4.57 / 5	91.4%	82.9%	35
Listening Circle Part One	4.58 / 5	91.7%	77.8%	36
Listening Circle Part Two	4.42 / 5	91.7%	66.7%	36
James Menefield's testimony	4.64 / 5	91.7%	83.3%	36
Attendees' Q&A time	4.43 / 5	94.3%	60%	35
Allen Plumb's closing remarks	4.57 / 5	94.3%	74.3%	35

### 5.3 Key Observations

**James Menefield's personal testimony** received the highest mean score (4.64 / 5), underscoring the irreplaceable power of first-person storytelling in restorative justice work.

**The Q&A session** received the highest percentage of Agree-or-better responses (94.3%), though with more "Agree" relative to "Strongly Agree" compared to other elements. This suggests the exchange was broadly valued, but that facilitation adjustments could deepen its impact further.

**Listening Circle Part Two** (focused on reintegration and community voice) had the highest proportion of "Agree" versus "Strongly Agree" responses. This is consistent with the challenging, less-resolved nature of reintegration as a topic—one where community members may hold more varied views.

Across all elements, fewer than 10% of responses were Neutral or lower, with virtually no "Disagree" responses recorded.

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## Section 6 — Qualitative Feedback

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Nineteen of the 39 surveys included written comments. The handwriting ranged in legibility; all available comments were reviewed and interpreted. Five consistent themes emerged:

### Theme 1 — Deep Personal Impact and Belief in Human Change

Attendees described being profoundly moved by the men of Proof of Life. Comments referenced inspiration, spiritual transformation, and personal challenge. The most extended written feedback—spanning the back of one form—captured this sentiment most fully:

*"These men are incredible and can change the world. It has often altered [me] in an almost amazingly positive way. The gentlemen in their programs are truly living proof that they can change and improve for the better. On behalf of us all, thank you."*

Another respondent wrote: "I have learned to take one day at a time and accept[ing] positively my imperfections. I learned that we are on journeys, in which we all have flaws—but express them in more ways than one."

### Theme 2 — Strong Recognition of Program Excellence

Multiple respondents praised the program in unambiguous terms:

- "Excellent program! These programs and opportunities are vital."
- "Such a great event!"
- "Amazing day — very productive."
- "Thank you for giving my [soul] truly inspired [words]."

### Theme 3 — Desire for More Programs and Greater Access

A significant cluster of comments focused not on critique but on wanting more—more events, more visibility, and more community access to similar programming:

- "More programs coming into prisons."
- "More awareness of what goes on [inside] for a wonderful experience."
- "Create [more connections]. There is a lot of great information to share."
- "More [programs], [involving] more incarcerated [people]."

## Theme 4 — Educator and Community Leader Engagement

At least one respondent expressed clear intent to return with students, suggesting the event's value to educators and organized community groups:

*"Willing to participate again with my students. Thank you!"*

This points to Proof of Life's potential as an experiential learning site for students in fields such as criminal justice, social work, psychology, restorative justice, and civic leadership.

## Theme 5 — Transformed Perceptions

Several comments reflected a shift in how attendees perceived the individuals they met—from abstraction to full humanity:

*"This event has been formative and impacted my view on how important it is to support [these programs]."*

*"I have appreciated the opportunity to [connect] in community and conversation. Individuals [are] at the heart of it. This event took these conversations [further]."*

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## Section 7 — What This Means for Each Audience

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### For Event Attendees

Your presence mattered. The connections made, the stories heard, the circles shared—these are the roots of restorative justice in action. The survey data confirms what you may have felt in the room: this was not an ordinary event. Ninety-two percent of your fellow attendees rated every element of the forum Agree or Strongly Agree. Your feedback will directly shape how future forums are organized.

Thank you for bringing your whole self into a space that asks a great deal of everyone. What you experienced was rare, and it mattered.

### For CIM Administration

The Proof of Life In-Prison Forum demonstrates the transformative potential of restorative justice education within Facility C. Thirty-two community members from outside the prison attended and left with measurably strengthened views of incarcerated people and correctional programming. Comments from community attendees reflected new understanding of the humanity and growth potential of the men they met.

This program is building exactly the kinds of bridges—between inside and outside, between those who caused harm and those affected—that support successful reintegration and reduce recidivism. The Proof of Life cohort’s initiative, discipline, and vulnerability in hosting this forum reflect well on the institution and its commitment to meaningful rehabilitation programming.

### For Conference Organizers (Inside Facilitators & R&RA)

All six forum elements received mean scores above 4.4 and positive ratings from more than 91% of respondents. The overall event was a clear success. Elements receiving more “Agree” than “Strongly Agree”—the Q&A session and Listening Circle Part Two—present productive opportunities for facilitation refinement rather than concerns about the program’s value.

Attendee comments suggest strong appetite for extended engagement: longer events, a shared meal, and more direct dialogue time with inside participants. These are worth building into future forum designs. The expressed intent to return with students also signals an opportunity for formalized partnerships with educational institutions.

### For the R&RA Board of Directors

The 2026 NCVRW In-Prison Forum validates the core mission of the Restoration & Resilience Alliance. With an overall satisfaction score of 4.54 / 5.0 and 92.5% positive ratings across 213 scored responses, the Proof of Life program is producing measurable, meaningful results.

Community members left as advocates. Educators expressed intent to return with students. Inside participants demonstrated the depth of their commitment through 52 weeks of sustained engagement—then opened their space to the outside world. This is restorative justice in its fullest expression.

The program deserves continued investment, expanded scope, formal documentation of its outcomes, and the institutional support needed to grow into a replicable model.

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## Section 8 — Recommendations

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Based on survey findings and qualitative feedback, R&RA offers the following recommendations for future Proof of Life forums:

- 1. Continue and expand the Proof of Life program.** Develop a second cohort.
- 2. Add a shared meal or lunch component.** Multiple respondents independently suggested extended engagement time and sharing a meal with inside participants. This would deepen relational connection.
- 3. Build formal partnerships with educational institutions.** One academic respondent indicated intent to return with students. Outreach to local colleges, universities, and high schools could formalize this pipeline.
- 4. Refine Q&A facilitation.** Explore structured question formats or small-group breakouts to ensure all voices have meaningful space during the Q&A segment.
- 5. Share these results with CIM administration.** Formal data sharing creates accountability, supports ongoing institutional partnership, and makes the case for program continuation.
- 6. Publish the writings and reflections from the Proof of Life cohort.** As originally envisioned, a collection of writings from participants would extend the program's reach and impact well beyond the forum itself. This would require CIM administration's approval.
- 7. Develop a longitudinal follow-up process.** Track attendees' ongoing engagement, parole outcomes for inside participants, and community impact to document the program's long-term effectiveness.

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## Section 9 — Acknowledgments

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The Restoration & Resilience Alliance gratefully acknowledges the contributions of all who made the 2026 NCVRW In-Prison Forum possible:

**Matthew Toerner, Allen Plumb, and Ryan Faith** — for the vision and courage to conceive Proof of Life, and for trusting R&RA with its care.

**The entire 2025–2026 Proof of Life First Cohort** — for 52 weeks of committed, courageous engagement, and for hosting this forum with grace and depth.

**Nora Jacob** — R&RA Executive Director and RJ facilitator, whose welcome and overview grounded the forum.

**Karly Giacalone** — R&RA Managing Director and RJ facilitator, whose documentation and encouragement provided the solid start of R&RA’s data collection and sharing.

**Angela Wirth** — CIM Community Resources Manager, for institutional partnership and ongoing incredible support.

**Captain Keith Robinson, CIM Facility C** — for approving the forum and authorizing community access to the facility, making this event possible.

**The CIM Facility C staff on duty** — for their professionalism and logistical support throughout the event day.

**Lt. Brad Heimer** — for early institutional support that helped to launch the program.

**James “Sharif” Menefield** — for the courage and generosity of his testimony, and for how deeply he has used Restorative Justice to change and heal his life.

**Allen Plumb** — for closing remarks that invited every attendee to carry the day forward, and for integrating Restorative Justice into every aspect of this event’s planning and implementation.

**All 39 survey respondents** — for sharing their honest experience and feedback.

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### **Restoration & Resilience Alliance (R&RA)**

*This report was prepared by R&RA following the April 21, 2026 In-Prison Forum at CIM Facility C.*

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