



Incarcerated Firefighters Helped Battle LA's Wildfires and Gave Back to the Community



Incarcerated Firefighters holding up their brand new donated thermals courtesy of JCOD's sponsors.

Since the wildfires erupted last month, incarcerated firefighters were among the heroes (and sheroes) who helped put an end to the destruction. It was inspiring to see the community of LA County show up for their communities during this devastating crisis. For JCOD Director, Judge Songhai Armstead (Ret.), providing these brave incarcerated firefighters with what they needed was important – whether it was insoles, thermals, feminine products, hygiene kits, gourmet food or a friendly conversation.



Judge Armstead (ret.) and Actress Kathryn Hahn [Center] and friends with Incarcerated Female Firefighters and their gift bags.

Many others joined Judge Armstead in supporting these brave men and women. Celebrities including Grammy Winners John Legend, The Weeknd, and Amy Allen (first woman to win a Grammy for Songwriter of the Year in 2025), Actors Kathryn Hahn and Amy Poehler, Agent Rich Paul, VP of A&R of Warner Records Gabz Landman and others contributed with their time, donations, or both. VF Corporation, The ANE Foundation, Shea Moisture, Timberland and others have also stepped up in a big way as sponsors of much needed supplies.

As always, JCOD is focused on the future and creating opportunities for these brave incarcerated firefighters. Judge Armstead shared the workforce and training programs available to them when they come home, including JCOD's Firefighter Training Program at The Los Angeles County Training Center (LACTC). The first cohort of the LACTC Firefighter Training Program graduated in November of 2024, ready to hit the ground running in forestry and structural firefighting careers. More than 50% of those graduates have already received job offers from Cal Fire. JCOD's Cohort 2 will kick off soon and will be all-female.

To learn more about this program, click [here](#)

Incubation Academy Cohort 8 Launch



JCOD's Incubation Academy launched the 8th Cohort on Wednesday, January 29th. The first seven cohorts combined have graduated 166 organizations, all of whom learned sustainability, nonprofit management, LA County contracts, grant writing, leveraging relationships with established providers, financial management and so much more.

JCOD Director, Judge Songhai Armstead (Ret.) told the 27 organizations embarking on their Incubation Academy journey that it is through collaboration and connection that we as a community will succeed and continue to thrive. Judge Armstead further highlighted that despite being in uncertain times, it's imperative to remain vigilant because the communities we serve need us now more than ever.

Cohort 8 is full of inspiring organization founders who are filled with gratitude and humility. JCOD's aim is to make sure those leaders start benefiting immediately from the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals who are at the same place in their journey that will equip them with the tools and resources to better run their organizations and serve their communities. Many entered as strangers but all left as colleagues and friends.

Based on the first day of instruction, these founders are clearly energized and ready to meet any and all challenges head-on. To watch our Incubation Academy Cohort 8 launch, [click here](#). To learn more about the Incubation Academy, visit [our website](#).



Staff Spotlight

Edward Mokhtarian – Administrative Services Manager III



Edward Mokhtarian celebrated his 15th anniversary with LA County in August of last year. After getting his start at the Department of Community and Senior Services in 2009, he worked at the Department of Mental Health for 11 years before moving over to the CEO's office. There, he worked with the Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) office where he helped build the Contracts and Grants Divisions for both JCOD and the Department of Youth Development (DYD), he then

transitioned to JCOD once the Department was established in November 2022.

“It was the opportunity of a lifetime to build the Contracts, Grants, Procurement and Monitoring Units within two brand new Departments (JCOD and DYD), while working for a Department with a mission that directly aligns with my values, beliefs and life goals. As a minority, I've also experienced injustice, prejudice and have been inaccurately profiled. I've had many friends growing up that ended up being justice-impacted, most of which never had the ability, resources, role models or support to ever get their lives together, some of which permanently ruined or lost their lives,” said Edward.

So much of JCOD's work lies in its contracts, which makes Edward an invaluable asset to the Department and the County. He manages and oversees the Contracts Management and Monitoring Division (CMMD), which consists of the Contract Development and Administration Unit (CDAU), Contract Compliance and Monitoring Unit (CMCU), Procurement Unit and Grants Unit.

What excites Edward most about working at JCOD is real opportunity for societal change. “Justice reform is very close to my heart. The justice system is broken, and I'm optimistic that we will be able to fix many of the issues through the work JCOD is currently doing and seeking to do in the future,” he added. In his free time, Edward enjoys weightlifting, biking and hiking. A secret foodie at heart, he loves exploring new restaurants and cooking.



Organization Spotlight

Pauly's Project



Originally founded by Paul Avila in 2012 to provide radios to the unhoused, Pauly's Project now also provides food, mentoring and workforce development for those in need. Paul was inspired to create Pauly's Project in honor of his son, Pauly, who was born blind, autistic and non-verbal.

While volunteering with the unhoused on skid row, Pauly saw a man with the same Colgate smile his son has while he listens to music. Since then, Pauly's Project has given out 10,000 radios while also expanding their services to address hunger and unemployment.

Paul says being a JCOD CFCI Care Grant recipient and JCOD Incubation Academy graduate has allowed his organization to help more people: "Our organization has grown tremendously in transforming more lives in different aspects. We now have a secondary van and larger warehouse space. It is amazing to see the new avenues that we have established due to our larger capacity. We now can identify projects to support the community, that we were unable to in the past. We can only do our work with the support of organizations like JCOD and our volunteers."



Paul added that the best part about running his organization is the success stories of those who just needed someone to acknowledge them in life, feel loved and that they matter in this world.

You can find more about Pauly's Project at paulysproject.org.





Upcoming Meetings & Events: Save the Date

JCOD's Public Convening Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

The next JCOD public convening meeting will take place on
Wednesday, February 19, from 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

You can join the public convening in Microsoft Teams or via phone:

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device

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