Truth is...
Alisha Coleman, SF County Jail

The picture I’m about to paint can only be heard, so listen closely to every word.

Innocent until proven guilty? They can’t be serious, in a system where Drug dealers get more time than serial killers, juveniles get tried as adults, before they become one. I guess nobody musta warned’em about playing with knives and guns.

Guilty by association? That’s what it’s called then they get hauled off to the pen, where some girls become boyz and some boyz become women. Sitting around unaware of who they are, wounded while in the belly of the beast. I call’em invisible scars, the kind that can’t be healed by Neosporin and stitches.

Went in walkin’ came out switching.

Could you imagine what it’s like? Being told that the beginning is really the end of your life. 3 strikes and you’re out! Some think it’s a game, but it’s really outta my hands. Lord knows, I’m not tryna do life on installment plans.

Everybody wanna be a part Of the occupy system, I need to occupy my life and find something to do with it, otherwise it’s useless.

Some may mistake my words as verbally abusive, But the truth is…

How do we expect our kids to grow from concrete, accept defeat, have to fend for themselves in cells where it is dark and hot as hell? More parents come to see kids in jail than they do at graduations. That’s cuz the new diploma is parole or probation.

Fucked up situation No contender.

“How I’ll be gone until November” Listening to a public pretender telling me to plea Y? Cuz I’m young, black, and sell crack in da streets. Babies committing robbery, 1st degree.

Even with blind eyes I could see it ain’t cool. They building prison programs and tearing down schools. We all got an opinion just like we all have a choice. No one can hear you speak if you don’t use your voice!
On January 13, 2012, The U.S. Supreme Court decided to hear the case of Tara Williams, a prisoner at CCWF. The Court will decide whether the Federal 9th Circuit Court overstepped its jurisdiction in May 2011 when it overturned Williams’ 1999 conviction.

The basis for the 9th Circuit decision (Williams v. Cavazos, No. 07-56127, D.C. No. CV-03-02691-GW) is that Tara Williams’ Sixth Amendment rights to a fair trial by jury had been violated when a holdout juror was incorrectly dismissed by the court. In the opinion he wrote for the 9th circuit three-judge panel, Judge Stephen Reinhardt made reference to the famous 1957 movie “Twelve Angry Men,” which told the story of a juror who held out against conviction despite the opinion of the eleven other jurors. In the movie, the holdout juror convinces the others not to convict; afterwards proof of the defendant’s innocence comes to light. However, in Williams’ trial, two days after the jury had begun deliberations the jury foreman wrote a note to the court stating that he believed that Juror No. 6 had, “expressed an intention to disregard the law.” The court then held an inquiry and an evidentiary hearing and decided to dismiss Juror No. 6 for bias. An alternate juror replaced Juror No. 6 and the next day Williams was convicted.

Williams appealed the conviction based on Sixth Amendment rights, to the California Court of Appeals which rejected her claim as meritless. The California Supreme Court denied further appellate review. She then filed a state habeas corpus petition in Los Angeles Superior Court which was denied. Next, she filed a federal habeas corpus petition with the Federal district court and the magistrate judge concluded that the [original] trial court’s factual finding of bias was entitled to deference [respect], and Tara’s petition was dismissed. Finally, she appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit which reversed the district court because the California Court of Appeal had only reviewed her state claim and hadn’t ruled on her federal constitutional claim.

The 9th Circuit found that the original trial court had not determined that Juror No. 6 was biased in any traditional sense of the term. Juror No. 6 had never stated that he could not be impartial, he had not accepted a bribe and he wasn’t connected to one of the parties involved in the case. Judge Reinhardt wrote, “In view of the reasonable possibility that Juror No. 6’s discharge was directly or indirectly the result of his position on the merits of the case, and in view of the lack of good cause to justify his dismissal, we hold that the removal of Juror No. 6 deprived Williams of her right to a fair trial by jury.”

When the US Supreme Court decided to take the case after California appealed the 9th Circuit’s decision, it indicated that it wouldn’t be reviewing the constitutional issue but instead the jurisdictional issue as to whether it was appropriate for the 9th Circuit to consider the case at all. According to the state of California, Williams had exhausted her potential remedies when the state and federal habeas corpus petitions had been rejected. It is important to note that last term the US Supreme Court reversed the 9th Circuit 19 times and only upheld its decisions 5 times. In April 2012, a friend of the court brief was submitted by 31 states urging the Supreme Court to overturn the 9th Circuit because it is based on a mistrust of state court process.

The case will be heard sometime after October 2012. The Fire Inside will keep readers posted regarding the outcome of this significant Supreme Court case. Our thoughts and support are with Tara Williams.
“For us, the proposed prison conversion and purposeful, escalated overcrowding of California’s women’s prisons system are matters of life and death.”

–Prisoner at Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF)

The CDCR is planning to convert Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) into a men’s prison. Instead of releasing thousands of women who are eligible to go home, CDCR plans to transfer them to the two remaining women’s prisons (CCWF and California Institution for Women). This conversion and the crowding of people—including pregnant and elderly women—into facilities that are already far above capacity will intensify by horrific proportions the medical neglect and premature death already rampant in women’s prisons.

In May 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that extreme overcrowding of prisons is unconstitutional, leading to increased violence, illness and deaths. California is manipulating the numbers, decreasing overcrowding in men’s prisons by increasing it in women’s prisons to create the illusion of complying with the court mandate. Over 700 people at VSPW and CCWF have written letters or signed a petition to stop this conversion plan. They wrote a joint statement calling on the public to support the following three demands:

1. We demand the State immediately halt its conversion program and stop the transfer of women to the remaining overburdened women’s prisons so we are not subjected to escalating abuse as direct result of historic overcrowding.

2. We demand that the State release enough people to address overcrowding of all people in its prison system.

3. We demand that when overcrowding has ceased for all people, that the State close Valley State Prison for all people and repurpose it into a non-correctional, community space.

The prisoners’ statement also points out the gender discrimination involved in the conversion decision stating, “It is a misogynist policy decision that capitalizes on the notion that women are not as inclined to violence and that we are less likely to riot.”

In 2010, California passed an Alternative Custody bill for women, holding out the possibility of release for thousands. To date, only 33 women have been deemed eligible for release under this law. At a time when state funds are desperately needed for schools, parks, health care, affordable housing, and many other social services, there is no need to put money into warehousing prisoners who are eligible for release.

On Jan 25, 2012, prisoners and their advocates won an important victory. With the help of statements from people inside and a declaration filed by Justice Now, the Madera County Superior Court issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) against the CDCR’s plan until September 2012. Over the next months, we need to collect more information from prisoners about the problems with the proposed conversion and any violations of the TRO. Help us raise public awareness and mobilize to win the three demands!

To sign a petition opposing the conversion of VSPW into a men’s prison, go to: http://www.womenprisoners.org/news/001066.html Contact CCWP for paper petitions to circulate.
Reajuste y Conversión de la Prisión: California juega al “donde quedó la bolita”

(**Resistimos un castigo cruel e inusual diariamente. El sistema del CDCR es muy inhumano con las mujeres internas. También somos personas. No somos animales.”**

-Mujer presa en el VSPW, enero del 2012)

(Nota: “@” es utilizado para incluir los género femenino, masculino y trans en algunos términos traducidos en este documento)

El estado de California está lidiando con una crisis masiva en el 2012. El gobernador Jerry Brown, los legisladores y el CDCR tratan de ‘resolver’ la crisis presupuestal al recortar servicios sociales para quienes más los necesitan y quienes son considerados prescindibles —incluyendo las más de 141,000 mujeres encarceladas, gente transgénero y hombres en las prisiones estatales. En respuesta al mandato de la Suprema Corte de los E.U. en mayo del 2011, para reducir la inconstitucional sobrepoblación de las prisiones en California, el estado está jugando al “donde quedó la bolita” con la vida de l@s pres@s por medio de su “plan de reajuste de la seguridad pública” que consiste en mover a pres@s estatales a cárceles de condados que están sobrepobladas y en pobres condiciones. Al mismo tiempo, el estado piensa convertir la Prisión Estatal del Valle para Mujeres (VSPW) en una prisión para hombres, apiñando a las mujeres y presas trans en las dos únicas prisiones para mujeres que quedan (vea artículo p. 14).

Por medio del reajuste, los condados pueden escoger entre invertir fondos en alternativas a la encarcelación de pres@s que califican para la liberación, y mantener a l@s que están en libertad condicional fuera de la cárcel. Ó, los condados pueden expandir sus sistemas carcerearios utilizando dinero autorizado para construir con la ley AB900, aprobada en el 2007 sin la aprobación de los residentes de California. En marzo del 2012, el estado dio más de $600 millones a la AB900 en dinero para la expansión de cárceles en condados. En tiempos cuando a los gobiernos locales apenas les alcanza para cubrir los servicios básicos, los condados ahora se apresuran para utilizar el dinero y encerrar más gente. Los Californianos Unidos por un Presupuesto Responsable (CURB- Californians United for a Responsible Budget) declaró en un reporte sobre el reajuste en marzo, mostrando que sólo cuatro condados (San Francisco, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz y Alameda) se están enfocando en la reducción de su población carceral y proveer servicios de base comunitaria a pres@s. En su mayoría, incluyendo a L.A. y San Mateo, buscan la planificación para expandir sus cárceles, con casi nada de apoyo a alternativas a la encarcelación.

En Los Angeles, con el sistema carceral más grande del mundo, presas, familias y activistas mantuvieron mitines para oponerse a la construcción de una nueva cárcel de mujeres, así como otras medidas para expandir cárceles. Las mujeres presas y trans están demandando la implementación de la ley de Alternativas a la Detención del 2010 (2010 Alternatives to Custody bill) el cual podría potencialmente liberar miles de mujeres que son madres, pero hasta el momento ha resultado en la liberación de tan sólo 33 personas. La veterana organizadora por los derechos de las presas Jane Dorotik, ha llevado a cabo la propuesta “Alternativas a la Custodia de Personas Mayores y Personas Mayores con condenas de por vida” (Elderly and Elderly-Lifer Alternative Custody), un llamado a la tan tardía liberación de gente mayor a los 55 años, lo cual puede ahorrar al estado cientos de miles de dólares cada año.

En CCWP creemos que la crisis presupuestal y la decisión de la Suprema Corte ofrece una importante oportunidad para lograr la liberación de más prisioneras y la clausura de prisiones. Junto con comunidades a lo largo de California nosotras insistimos:

El uso de dinero del reajuste para alternativas a la encarcelación, no expansión!

Cierre de VSPW, no la conviertan!

Implemento de programas con alternativas a la detención para madres y personas mayores presas!

Cancelación de fondos autorizados por la AB900 para toda expansión de cárceles y prisiones!

Traducción por Alma Muñoz

The Fire Inside
Recently a CDCR spokesperson informed the media that the women at VSPW were fully on board with this transition. This is not accurate... I feel strongly that gender discrimination is involved in this decision. The women are and have been over 100% capacity, just as the men have been.

- J. Clark, VSPW

The State of California is dealing with a massive budget crisis in 2012. Gov. Jerry Brown, the legislators and the CDCR are trying to ‘solve’ the budget crisis by cutting services for those most in need and deemed most expendable—including the over 141,000 incarcerated women, transgender people and men in state prisons. Responding to the May 2011 US Supreme Court mandate to reduce the unconstitutional overcrowding in CA prisons, California is playing a shell game with prisoner lives, shifting state prisoners to overcrowded and resource-poor county jails through its “public safety realignment plan.” At the same time, the state is planning to convert Valley State Prison for Women into a men’s prison, squeezing women and trans prisoners into the only two remaining women’s prisons (see article on p. 3).

Through realignment, counties can choose to spend funds on alternatives to incarceration that release qualified prisoners and keep people on parole out of jail. Or counties can expand their jail systems using construction money authorized by AB900, passed in 2007 without any approval from California residents. In March 2012, the state issued over $600 million of AB900 money to counties for jail expansion. At a time when local governments can barely afford basic services, counties are now scrambling to use construction money to lock more people up.

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) issued a realignment report card in March showing that only four counties (San Francisco, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Alameda) are actually focusing on reducing their jail populations and providing former prisoners with community based services. Most, including L.A. and San Mateo, are pursuing jail expansion plans with almost no support for alternatives to incarceration.

In Los Angeles, with the world’s largest jail system, prisoners, families and activists have rallied to oppose the construction of a new women’s jail as well as other jail expansion measures. Women and trans prisoners are demanding implementation of the 2010 Alternatives to Custody bill which could potentially release thousands of women who are mothers, but so far has resulted in the release of only 33 people. Long-time prisoner rights organizer Jane Dorotik has put forward an “Elderly and Elderly-Lifer Alternative Custody” proposal that calls for the long-overdue release of incarcerated people over 55 which could save the state hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

At CCWP, we believe that the budget crisis and the Supreme Court ruling offer an important opportunity for achieving the release of more prisoners and closure of prisons. Along with communities across California we insist:

Use Realignment $ for alternatives to incarceration, not expansion!

Close VSPW, don’t convert it!

Implement alternative custody programs for mothers and elderly prisoners!

Cancel all prison and jail expansion funding authorized by AB900!

We are going to be removed from the very little comfort we have to be housed in a gym or on the floor in dayrooms. This makes us victims for anyone who wants to pick a fight and for our belongings to be taken from us. You are violating our rights, and we do have rights!

- S. Russo, VSPW

I am classified as DPW (full-time wheelchair user); I do not walk or stand, and am a lifer over 60 years of age. This of course makes me very vulnerable. There is only one unit at CCWF that houses DPW which is already over 100% capacity.

- E. Miller, VSPW

Recently a CDCR spokesperson informed the media that the women at VSPW were fully on board with this transition. This is not accurate... I feel strongly that gender discrimination is involved in this decision. The women are and have been over 100% capacity, just as the men have been.

- J. Clark, VSPW

I am a lifer fighting for a date and I’m being a voice for the other women here that are long-termers and lifers. To be removed from VSPW, which offers 56 self-help groups to all inmates and placed into a facility that has only six (CCWF), would be very traumatizing and a drastic change for women...

- K.L. Street, VSPW

“We endure cruel and unusual punishment on a daily basis. The CDCR system is very inhumane to female inmates. We are people too. We are not animals.”

-Person imprisoned at VSPW, January 2012
A
fter the heroic hunger strike by thousands of prisoners in 13 California prisons during July and September of 2011, the prisoners recognize that the struggle is just beginning. According to SHU prisoners, “The main accomplishment of the strike was to force CDCR to sit down and talk with us. Previously, they would not talk with us at all.” During negotiations through October 2011, CDCR administrators admitted to Pelican Bay (PB) prisoners and their mediators that the 5 core demands (see FI #45) were completely reasonable.

The CDCR finally issued their response on March 9, 2012. The CDCR proposed step-down program is no different than the current “no-way-out-but-snitching-or-death” program, and hands the hated Institutional Gang Investigator (IGI) even more power over SHU prisoners. After careful reading and consideration, the PB SHU-Short corridor prisoner representatives totally rejected the CDCR proposal stating it, “seeks to manipulate lawmakers and taxpayers into allowing the CDCR-OCS (Office of Correctional Safety) to significantly expand on the use of these SHU/AdSeg units via creation of new criteria …they call Security Threat Groups (SGP).” The prisoners further stated that the CDCR proposal would, “allow them to continue to violate thousands of prisoners’ human rights, including the use of torture.”

On March 19, 2012, the PB SHU Short Corridor prisoner reps issued a detailed, fact-based proposal outlining a step-by-step plan to transform the current SHU policy, and eliminate the torture of long-term solitary confinement [For full proposal see: http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com]. The prisoners’ proposal is based on programs already proven effective in CA prisons, the Max-B Management Control Unit programs (San Quentin Max-B and Chino-DVI), that, “afforded as much programming as general population and

The CDCR’s response. The strike accomplished an unprecedented unity of action among SHU prisoners and solidarity with the general prison population. It inspired solidarity actions in many prisons in the U.S. and in other countries. The strike also built support outside the prisons, bringing together many organizations that have sometimes been isolated from one another. Most importantly, it brought activists together with families with loved ones inside.

As the continuing actions of prisoners, family members, advocates and Occupy 4 Prisoners show, we are working to create a national movement to stop the human rights abuses of solitary confinement and prisons in general. More than 400 prisoners signed a petition (filed by Peter Schey of the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law) asking the UN to investigate torture in California prisons and SHUs

“So far our collective activity has proven to be powerful among all the prisoners, and between prisoners and the outside. The struggle is just beginning.”
**Burning Tears**  
*Terah J. Lawyer, CCWF (2011)*

My tears burn. They burn my eyes as they trickle down my face, hot with the seething pain. I can’t find the off button to my emotions nor can I control my mind…. The burn continues. I try to calm the storm inside, but the thundering feelings ignite the fire. Where is my self-control, my self-composure?

I can’t seem to locate that flicker of light that leads me out of this darkness. I can’t see anything; not my blessings, my future, my hope, my today. I’m blinded by my own burning tears. I seek out a distraction – anything to transport my mind into a better perspective… I can’t give in nor give up. The strength will come, it always does.

This isn’t my first time fighting the war between my conscious thoughts and my emerging subconscious emotions. Something unforeseen wakes them - a picture from my past, a television commercial, the soft scent of a fading memory. I retreat, longing for privacy, or a safe haven where I can allow my emotions to flow without the scrutinized eyes of others, without facing judgmental stares, without feeling shameful for merely feeling.

My tears burn… my inner soul feels the smoldering, painful heat. Yet, my human spirit is tenacious and is capable of withstanding the heat. My tears burn and I let them burn because I’m reminded of where I’ve come from and the direction I’m going. My tears burn and this is fine because they’re mine.

**Being Out on Parole**  
*Vonda White*

This holiday season (12/2010) is the 2/3 mark of my parole. Next year at this time I should be completely free! A long-time prison friend remarked that it takes about five years to normalize after release from prison. This is probably correct.

When I found myself miraculously on the outside two years ago, I went at life as though I was “killing snakes.” Though I was living in a very good place and had a secure job, transportation, access to a computer and a cell phone I felt thrust into solitude after the active, super-responsible life-style I had in prison. Quite suddenly I had to walk long distances (an hour or more) to a bus line, and I was faced with many things I wanted to do. Through my parole officers, I got out of San Diego almost every month: to Pasadena to visit my sister Muriel; to Forestville to visit Jeri and plan for the book we want to write; to Las Vegas to visit my two middle daughters and their families; and then the big one, to a huge family reunion in Oregon where I was able to spend some time with my youngest daughter and visit with hundreds of family members.

I rejoice in other highlights of this past year: a six-month, weekly conference call class Muriel and I conducted with two of our daughters and a niece. This class, “Healing the Eight Stages of Life,” was adapted from one that I held for many years at CIW…. I think of you often and wish you a wonderful next year!

LOVE, VONDA
"Inside, outside, we’re all on the same side!” The chant rang out as busloads of Occupy 4 Prisoners activists arrived at San Quentin for the Feb. 20 National Occupy Day in Support of Prisoners. This day marked the historic merging of the Occupy movement with prison justice organizations like California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) and others who have been working in the trenches for years – bringing new energy to the anti-prison movement and increased awareness for Occupy activists of the other 1% – the 2.5 million incarcerated people.

On February 20 activists in cities all over the US marched on prisons, detention centers, prison-building contractors and pro-incarceration elected officials. Occupy 4 Prisoners called on activists nationwide to support abolishment of unjust sentences, solitary confinement, and repression of activists as well as the freeing of political prisoners and solidarity with movements initiated by incarcerated people, such as the Georgia Prison Strike and the Pelican Bay/California Prisoners Hunger Strikes. The call included spending tax money on the needs of our communities rather than prisons.

The crowd of around 800 that day was entirely peaceful. Colorful banners, artwork, and passionate speakers created a liberated zone even in the “valley of the shadow of death” that is San Quentin.

The program centered around amplifying the voices of incarcerated people, and CCWP participation ensured that incarcerated women’s voices and issues were an important part of the day. Statements and poetry by women in the San Francisco County Jail were read, as well as a statement by Jane Dorotik at the California Institution for Women, detailing the high cost to society of imprisoning women. Kelly Turner related to the crowd how she had been sentenced to 25 years to life under the 3 Strikes law, and said she was “still trying to get comfortable in my skin” after enduring solitary confinement. Deirdre Wilson, program coordinator for CCWP, spoke from her heart about how the 99% needs the resilience of the bottom 1%.

Occupy 4 Prisoner will continue to organize and build solidarity with all imprisoned, oppressed people. We will engage in energetic movement-building to support the courageous organizing already occurring within the walls.

LA LUCHA CONTINUA!
At the San Quentin Prison rally on Feb. 20, 2012 organized by Occupy 4 Prisoners, we created a message wall for people to speak from their hearts to incarcerated loved ones.

We set up a 6 by 4 foot piece of wire fencing a block from San Quentin’s eastern gate. A nearby basket held ribbons and red, orange and yellow pieces of paper. We encouraged people to write a message and tie it on with a piece of colorful ribbon.

As the day wore on, more and more messages were added until the entire fence was covered. It was a stunning visual representation of love and support for incarcerated people. Here are some of the over 200 messages:
The 2.3 million individuals that we as a nation incarcerate has become one of the defining qualities of this country of ours. Never before in the history of civilization has a country locked away so many of its own people. Have we as society become so violent, so incorrigible that we must lock away so many? How did we get to this point under the guise of ‘public safety?’

The cost of incarcerating women is immense. The average annual cost to incarcerate a woman is $50,000 and the average cost to incarcerate a woman over 55 is a staggering $138,000. Because of their role as mothers, the costs and consequences go far beyond the criminal justice system. Their children are either raised by other family members or are sent to the state’s foster care system. Children whose parents are incarcerated are 4-5 times more likely to become incarcerated themselves, thus perpetuating the inter-generational incarceration cycle. Since 1991, the number of children with a mother in prison has increased by more than 131% and nationwide more than half of children whose mother are incarcerated are under age 10.

The prison system is a system gone awry, gravely compromised and rampant with abuses. It is a terrifying breeding ground for anger, hatred, sexism, homophobia and dominating exploitation of other human beings. We are warehousing people, punishing them and then returning them to society worse off than when they entered the system. The violence that then comes out of these prisons is a much greater threat to public safety than any foreign terrorist group ever could be.

Fire Inside’s 15th Anniversary Celebration
Pamela Fadem

On October 14, 2011 hundreds of prison survivors, families and activists came together at the Women’s Building in San Francisco for a night of celebration, remembrance and re dedication to our work. CCWP is committed to continuing the work of The Fire Inside, nurturing the fire of creativity and resistance on both sides of the prison walls.
El CDCR (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) planea convertir la Prisión Estatal para Mujeres del Valle (VSPW) en una prisión para hombres. En lugar de liberar a miles de mujeres quienes son elegibles para regresar a casa, el CDCR planea transferirlas a las únicas dos prisiones que quedan para mujeres (CCWF y California Institution for Women). Esta conversión y amputación de gente — incluyendo mujeres embarazadas y mayores de edad— en instalaciones que ya están muy por encima de su capacidad, intensificará en proporciones horrorizantes la negligencia médica, y la muerte prematura que ya está desenfrenada en las prisiones para mujeres.

En mayo del 2011, la Corte Suprema de E.U. dictaminó que la sobreocupación en las prisiones es inconstitucional, llevando al aumento de violencia, enfermedades y muertes. California está manipulando los números, disminuye la sobreocupación en las prisiones para hombres y aumenta en las prisiones de mujeres, para crear la ilusión de estar cumpliendo con el mandato de la corte. Más de 700 personas en la VSPW y CCWF han escrito cartas y firmado peticiones para frenar el plan de conversión. Hicieron una declaración conjunta para pedirle a la opinión pública su apoyo a las siguientes tres demandas:

1. Demandamos que el Estado ponga fin inmediatamente a su programa de conversión y pare la transferencia de presas a las sobrecargadas prisiones para mujeres que quedan, para que no seamos sujetas al aumento de abusos como un resultado directo de la histórica práctica de sobreocupación.

2. Demandamos que el Estado libere suficiente gente para tratar el asunto de la sobreocupación en su sistema de prisiones.

3. Demandamos que cuando la sobreocupación de toda gente haya cesado, que el Estado cierre la Prisión Estatal del Valle para toda persona y que le dé un uso diferente al correccional, abrir un espacio comunitario.

La declaración de las prisioneras también señala la discriminación de género implicadas en la decisión de conversión expone, “es una decisión política misógina que capitaliza la idea de que las mujeres no tienen inclinaciones hacia la violencia ó que es menos probable que hagamos motines.”

En el 2010, California pasó una ley de Custodia Alternativa para mujeres, sosteniendo la posibilidad de liberar a miles. Hasta el día de hoy, solo 33 mujeres fueron consideradas elegibles bajo esta ley. En tiempos cuando los fondos estatales se necesitan desesperadamente para escuelas, parques, cuidados de salud, vivienda asequible y muchos otros servicios sociales, no hay necesidad de embodigar prisioneras quienes son elegibles para ser liberadas.

El 25 de Enero del 2012, prisioneras y sus defensor@s ganaron una importante victoria. Con la ayuda de declaraciones de gente que están dentro y una declaración firmada por Justice Now, La Suprema Corte del Condado de Madera expidió una orden de restricción temporal (ORT) contra el plan del CDCR hasta septiembre del 2012. En los próximos meses, necesitamos recabar más información de prisioner@s sobre los problemas con la propuesta de conversión y cualquier violación al ORT. ¡Ayudanos a concientizar al público y movilizarse para ganar las tres demandas!

Para firmar la petición en oposición a la conversión de la VSPW en una prisión para hombres, vaya a http://www.womenprisoners.org/news/001066.html Contacte a CCWP para conseguir peticiones en papel para que sean circuladas.
I’ve spent 6 years fighting my case to prove my innocence and to try to save my life.
The fight has really taken its toll on my family and filled us all with strife.
I was only 16 and now I am almost 22. I pray that this is something you never go through.
I tried so hard to make my parents proud, now I hide my face when I stand in a crowd.

Take this cup from me and please let it pass. I was doing so well, was the best in my class.
I made a poor choice of friends ones that were hateful and cruel, they say maybe this is because I was bullied in school.

I pray with all my heart and soul that I make it back home.
That I am afraid of too, this place now is all I know.
They want to give me life. To make an example out of me and they fail to notice I was just a teen.
They do not care about my good deeds, my grades, or me working so hard to always please. They do not know how I saved strays, or that I was a volunteered at my church.
As I am now just a number, no face and no name, I sit in this system and I pray to be saved.
The few women I get close to either turn or go home. It is so scary to feel so alone.
Will I one day be free to make a life of my own? To marry a good man have a family and house of my own? Or am I going to spend the rest of my life like this? Everyday feels like a test. I can’t remember a full night of rest.
I love the rain yet I haven’t felt it in years, the closest I get is my own salty tears.
I love animals and always did my best to save them, now I know firsthand how cruel it is to cage them.

I don’t want to be some example, statistic or even a check in some lawyer’s deep pockets.
I want to reclaim my life and clear my name not live a life of a horrible fame.
Not even money to buy my way out, post bail, or pay an Attorney, as I hit my knees each night I wonder if God even hears me.
I don’t want to live my life like a convict or crook, I know I should have been with my nose in a book.
I know how it feels to be lost and alone and it hurts even more knowing my parents don’t have a home.
They dedicated their lives to bring their baby girl back, they have lost it all except some bills in a stack.
I hope that young girls and boys alike too, that you never sit in a cell like I do with no one to trust not a cop nor a friend.
When people go home you never know if you’ll see them again.
Maybe I too am an Angel with broken wings who tried to grow up to fast, like the Devil’s Puppet on strings.
If I could go back I’d change it all, do it over. Maybe next time I won’t hand my life over.
NOTE: Alisha (words in italics) is a CCWP member inside contributing wisdom weekly, as well as poetry (see page 1). Alisha is also a plaintiff in the recently filed lawsuit challenging the Secretary of State’s decision to deny the right to vote to those sentenced to jail instead of prison under Realignment.

As we cross into 2012, we ride a wave of change. We are speaking a new language of transformation. Whether it is the CD-CR’s ‘Realignment’ or grass roots prairie fires of the Arab Spring and the movement of the 99%, something new is definitely afoot.

Where we go with this shift depends on the relationships we build in our own communities and how we build them. Powerful and heartfelt relationships are being forged through the heat of CCWP’s weekly membership meetings in the ‘Sisters Pod’ of San Francisco County Jail (SFCJ) and we are -- Fired Up! The Fire Inside was a spark that ignited the flame for us to get Fire Up!

Since Sept 2011, I’ve been a part of CCWP’s weekly group meetings here in SF CJ#2. Never before have I met a group of individuals so passionate about the well-being of women in and outside the jail/prison system.

The difference between this group and other groups I’ve attended is the true “solidarity” we have amongst one another. These women are dedicated to helping other women find the fire inside themselves that someone tried to put out.

Starting with myself, winging it on my own, we are now a solid crew of 7+ members from the outside who co-create the mission of Fired Up with members inside every week. There is a solid core of women inside that hope to contribute to the work of CCWP on the outside in the future.

It’s quite empowering to know that even after the group session is over, someone is out there standing up for what’s “right” in this system of wrongdoing. CCWP has given a lot of us a choice to speak and be heard, when the “powers that be” don’t want to listen.

We discovered that we share many friends among women and trans prisoners, crossing paths inside the prison walls over the years.

When I’m able to hear about the accomplishments of women in prison, it gives me the inspiration to do better and be better, so that I can make a way to pave a way.

It is tremendously meaningful to bring all of our stories into the discussion circle inside the jail. We have laughed and we have cried.

We talk about things that are relevant to our lives and what is going on in the world. We discuss ideas and books on many subjects: Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow, Dr. Joy Degruy’s Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome, grief, love, addiction, re-entry and Realignment. The group includes all ages and cultures. The number of us that have children is our greatest commonality. We give a lot of attention to the shame we feel as ‘bad mothers’; feelings both self-imposed and heaped upon us by society as prisoners and former prisoners.

I wish that CCWP had the resources and funding to connect women to outside help. Although the groups are uplifting, it would be that much more successful if we could further assist women leaving jail and prison.
Voices from the SF Jail Project

My name is Veronica Hernandez. I am a 20-year-old young woman incarcerated since I was 16 and tried as an adult at 17.

Prior to being charged as an adult I was appointed a no-good attorney that couldn’t have cared less about me or the outcome of my case. There are no law libraries or legal services at Juvenile Hall, so a juvenile had no choice but to be dependent on his or her court-appointed attorney. Unfortunately for me, that direction was to adult court where I now face a life sentence should I be convicted.

In California, 16-year-olds are eligible to be tried as adults. In some states, the minimum age to be tried as an adult is 13-years-old. In others, there is no age limit at all depending on the nature of the crime. Juveniles tried as adults are subjected to harsher punishments, such as life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), or sentences so outrageous like “43 to life” or “51 to life” that those sentences might as well be LWOP.

The human mind doesn’t stop developing until age 25, so it is ridiculous that a judge has the power to determine that a juvenile can never be rehabilitated and will remain at the same state of mind as the time their crime was committed. Aside from ridiculous, it is outrageous...oppressive...opprobrious...and something that needs to cease. Abolish this oppression and give children the chance at life that each and everyone of them deserve.

Karen Lyons, FIRED UP! member released from SF County Jail on 4/29/12

My dream is that instead of fighting one another with so much hatred in our hearts, one day we would all be able to live in peace and happiness. Regardless, if we are strangers to one another or not, it would be possible for us to come to one another for support without so much judgment.

Anything can get accomplished if we go for what we want and all it takes is just a little understanding and the strength for us to be all on the same page to create a movement to fight for our rights.”

Margarita, SF County Jail

My name is Margarita and I’m gonna tell you my story. My dad used to molest me when I was very young, as far back as age 2. He sure did some foul things to me. He used to tell me if I said anything he would take me off the team. You see, I raced downhill snow skiing on the USA. Women’s division ski team and I was very good. My father used that as bait.

I was very active growing up, a tomboy some would say. I raced motocross, BMX, swimming, dance, karate, etc. I ran away at my last speed skating race when I was 11 ½ years old. My parents were already divorced. I went to Los Angeles, from Los Angeles to Watts. At age 13 ½ I caught my first case and was convicted as a young adult; the first female for a 187 at age 14 to be convicted as an adult. I got 15 to life and did 12 years. I started in Juvie and then transferred to Youth Authority and from Youth Authority to CIW.

I did my first stretch of 8 years at Chowchilla; 4 in lock-down and 4 on the yard. They tried to give me 3 years more in lock-down for an assault on a CO. He came into my cell and tried to rape me. So when I was out in the day room ironing my pants, I took the iron and hit him over the head. I stayed 6 months in confinement. I also had a petition going around letting all the girls sign it cause I wasn’t this CO’s first victim. I ended up with 560 signatures and he was escorted off the yard and his rights were stripped. No longer in can he become a legal Correctional Officer in any federal or state prison.

Veronica Hernandez, SF County Jail

My dream is that instead of fighting one another with so much hatred in our hearts, one day we would all be able to live in peace and happiness. Regardless, if we are strangers to one another or not, it would be possible for us to come to one another for support without so much
Below is an edited version of a letter campaign organized by Teresa Patterson (W-23487), a lifer at CCWF. Thank you Teresa and everyone at CCWF who circulated and signed this letter.

Gov. Jerry Brown,

We are called the forgotten, the lifers here at CCWF. We have been left behind by the system we look up to. Many of us have been overlooked by many and helped by few because of our circumstances. We look forward to going to the Board of Prison Hearings in hopes that it will be our last time, but most of the time that never happens.

They say get your GED, your Associate Degree, more self-help groups. Whatever they say, we do, but they want more and more. Many of us have been locked away for 25 to 30 years. Why is it that we’ve sat here for decades hoping one day we will get a chance to be free and it still doesn’t happen? So we lift each other up and tell each other to hold on, but it is too late for some.

What is happening to our system that says to rehabilitate yourself…but it is never enough? They say give more and we still give…in hopes that one day we will gain our freedom.

Below is an edited version of a letter campaign organized by Teresa Patterson (W-23487), a lifer at CCWF. Thank you Teresa and everyone at CCWF who circulated and signed this letter.

Wanda Brown -released April 2012, is finally home with her family.

Windy Click and Dana Robinson, longtime CCWP members, have both been found suitable for parole in April 2012. Look for petitions to sign to the Governor in coming months!

Parole Beat: Precious Releases, Outrageous Denials

CCWP sends love and strength to long-time Fire Inside contributing artist Andrea Mims. Currently going through cancer treatment in the CCWF SNF, ‘drea is going to the parole board in July 2012.
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
A Project of Network on Women in Prison
1540 Market St., Room 490
San Francisco, CA  94102

Come work with us!
CCWP volunteer nights are on the
1st Wednesday of every month at 6pm
1540 Market St., rm 490, San Francisco
Write to us or call us (415) 255-7036 x4
www.womenprisoners.org
fax: (415) 552-3150,  email: info@womenprisoners.org

CCWP Mission:
CCWP is a grassroots social justice organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC, and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families and communities most impacted in building this movement.

Yes, I want to support women prisoners!

☐ Please contact me to volunteer
☐ Enclosed is $25 contribution to help send a newsletter subscription to a woman in prison
☐ Enclosed is my contribution of $  _______

Name: ___________________________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________
Phone/email: _____________________________________________________

Please make checks payable to: CCWP/LSPC 1540 Market St., Room 490, San Francisco, CA  94102