

The Fire Inside

Newsletter of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners

1540 Market Street, Room 490, San Francisco, CA 94102 www.womenprisoners.org

20 years of speaking Truth to Power



Photo by Hafsa Al-Amin

November 2015 gathering of CCWP members, including many of the founders

When CCWP was founded in 1995, California already had the largest women's prisons in the world, caging over 10,000 women and transgender people. But no one knew they existed. When CCWP founding member Charisse Shumate insisted, "The big cover up is going on inside!" and asked, "Is it because they have forgot we are human?" she was naming the invisible reality: to the state of California the lives of Black, Brown and other poor women behind bars did not matter.

Twenty years ago when CCWP began, the phrases mass incarceration and orange is the new black were far from being coined, and politicians were busy expanding the prison system that they now claim they want to reform. CCWP is proud that our dedication to speaking truth to power has contributed to important

changes in public awareness and in policy over two decades.

Over the past year, CCWP has continued our legacy of speaking out by bringing information about the increase in suicides in the women's prisons to legislative committees in Sacramento and in home district meetings. We brought the voices of people living with LWOP sentences to the public through the Living Chance storytelling project and in stories and portraits shared in the most recent issue of *The Fire Inside* newsletter (#52). We hosted several performances of the play, *Mariposa and the Saint*, co-written by CCWP members Mariposa/Sara Fonseca, who had been unjustly locked in solitary confinement for over three years, and performance artist Julia Allen. We worked with peer health educators and members of

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People v. Banks, 61 Cal.4th 788 (2015)—La Corte Suprema de California, 9 de julio del 2015

Esta decisión de la Corte Suprema del Estado es importante para aquellas personas que fueron encontradas culpables de felonía-asesinato en circunstancias especiales y sentenciadas a cadena perpetua (“LWOP”), como sentencia mandatoria por las circunstancias especiales del asesinato. Si la evidencia era insuficiente para demostrar de que quien es acusado actúo de forma culposa y con indiferencia a la vida humana, tal como se requiere para ser legalmente elegible para una sentencia de LWOP, que se basa en el resultado de una verdadera circunstancia especial de felonía-asesinato en un juicio por asesinato en primer grado, robo o intento de robo; y que nada dentro del juicio sostuvo una conclusión fundada de cualquier duda de que él o la acusada sabía que sus acciones podían envolver un grave riesgo de muerte y que no había evidencia de que la persona acusada tenía la intención de matar, entonces esa persona puede solicitar un auto de habeas para compensar su sentencia. Si usted entra dentro de este criterio, CCWP tiene un paquete para ayudarlo a escribir un habeas resumido, gracias al trabajo de nuestro compañero Sonny Ramirez en San Q. Muchas gracias Sonny! Escribanos a CCWP para pedir el paquete informativo *Banks*, escriba BANKS INFO afuera del sobre.

La SB 261: Firmada como ley el día 3 de octubre del 2015, **EXPANDE la 2014 SB260**, la ley “Youth Offender Parole” ahora es aplicable a personas que tenían **18, 19, 20, 21 o 22 años cuando cometieron el crimen.**

Es elegible a la SB 261 si:

1. Tenía menos de 23 años cuando cometiste el crimen.
2. Su sentencia fue cadena perpetua (“L”) o se te dio una sentencia determinada (“No L”)
3. No es descalificada por alguna de las siguientes razones:

NO es elegible a la SB 261 si:

1. Fué sentenciada bajo la ley de las “tres faltas” (three strikes) basadas en dos o más felonías serias o violentas, o si fuiste sentenciadx a cadena perpetua por “una falta” (one strike) por ciertas ofensas sexuales. PC 1170.12:667(b)-(i):667.61
2. Fué sentenciada a LWOP.
3. Fué convicta por un *crimen nuevo* que sucedió a la edad de 23 o más y se le dió sentencia de de cadena perpetua. PC 3051(h)
4. Fué convicta por un *crimen nuevo* que sucedió a la edad de 23 o más, y no necesariamente tenía el elemento de “premeditación”. Estos crímenes incluyen: asesinato en primer grado (PC 187), asesinato en segundo grado (PC 187), intento de asesinato (PC 664/187), conspiración para cometer un asesinato (PC 182/187), solicitar que se cometa un asesinato (PC 653f(b)); un asalto cometido por una persona que cumple una sentencia de cadena perpetua con un arma mortal o que puede producir gran daño físico (PC4500).



La SB 519 cambia las fechas en las cuales la mesa directiva esta obligada a completar audiencia para la libertad condicional de un delincuente juvenil que cumple con las guías de la SB 261. Para quienes tienen cadena perpetua (“Lifers”), la nueva fecha límite para completar su audiencia para la libertad condicional es el 1º de enero del 2018. La fecha límite para las personas con una determinada sentencia (“no L”) es el 31 de diciembre del 2021. La ley requiere que BPH haga una consulta con cada una de las personas que califican seis años antes de su audiencia. Todas las consultas deben ser completadas antes del 1º de enero del 2018.

Para más información de la SB 261 & SB 519:
www.fairsentencingforyouth.org



People v. Banks, 61 Cal.4th 788 (2015)—California Supreme Court, July 9, 2015

This state Supreme Court decision is important for people who were found guilty of felony-murder special circumstance, and sentenced to LWOP, as a mandatory lesser sentence for special circumstance murder. If evidence was insufficient to show that defendant acted with reckless indifference to human life, as required to be legally eligible for an LWOP sentence based on finding felony-murder special circumstance true in a trial for first-degree murder, burglary, or attempted robbery; and nothing at trial supported conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt that defendant knew her or his actions would involve grave risk of death, and there was no evidence that defendant intended to kill, then a person can file a habeas petition for sentencing relief. If you fit these criteria, we have a packet to help write your Habeas brief, thanks to the work of our friend Sonny Ramirez at San Q. Thank you Sonny! Write to CCWP to request *Banks info packet*, put **BANKS INFO** on the outside of the envelope.

SB 261: Signed into law on Oct. 3, 2015, SB 261 EXPANDS the 2014 SB260, the “Youth Offender Parole” law to now apply to people who were 18, 19, 20, 21, or 22 at the time of their crimes.

You ARE eligible for SB 261 if:

1. You were under age 23 when you committed the crime.
2. You were sentenced to life (“L”) or given a determinate sentence (“No L”)
3. You are not disqualified for one of the reasons below.

You are NOT eligible for SB 261 if:

1. You were sentenced under the “three-strikes” law based on two or more prior serious or violent felonies, or you were sentenced to a “one strike” life sentence for certain sex offenses. PC 1170.12; 667(b)-(i); 667.61.
2. You were sentenced to Life Without Parole (LWOP).
3. You were convicted of a new crime that happened at age 23 or over and you were given a life sentence for that conviction. PC 3051(h).
4. You were convicted of a new crime that happened at age 23 or older, and that had “malice aforethought” as a necessary element. These crimes include: first degree murder (PC 187), second degree murder (PC 187), attempted murder (PC 664/187), conspiracy to commit murder (PC 182/187), solicitation to commit murder (PC 653f(b)); assault by a person serving a life sentence that is with a deadly weapon or that is likely to produce great bodily injury (PC 4500).

SB 519 changes the dates by which the board is required to complete youth offender parole hearings for people who meet the SB 261 guidelines. For Lifers, the new deadline for completing parole hearings is Jan. 1, 2018. The deadline for people with a determinate sentence (“no L”) is Dec. 31, 2021. The law requires that BPH do a consultation with each qualifying person six years before their hearing. All consultations must be completed by Jan. 1, 2018.

For more info on SB 261 & SB 519 go to:

www.fairsentencingforyouth.org ■

Survived and Punished

CCWP is part of a new coalition, Survived and Punished (www.survivedandpunished.org, #SurvivedandPunished). The coalition works to publicize, support and demand freedom for survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence whose survival actions have been criminalized. Some of the survivors are still in prison, some are on home confinement, some are in immigration detention, and others live with the threat of incarceration or deportation at any moment. Other groups in the coalition are *Free Marissa Now Mobilization Campaign*, *Love & Protect (Chicago)* and *Stand with Nan-Hui*. ■

SUPPORT THE FIRE INSIDE

If you are not in prison, are getting *The Fire Inside* in the mail and have NOT made a donation in the past year, PLEASE do so now. See address on back page.

Accepting Labels, Rebuilding Self

Kelly Savage, CCWF

Editor's Note: These two pieces were accidentally left out of FI #52, the LWOP issue. FI apologizes to Kelly and notes that whole idea for an issue focused on LWOP was Kelly's! Thank you Kelly, for all of your work.

Accepting Labels

When I think about being an LWOP many thoughts come to mind: hopeless, stuck, isolated, pain, giving up, helpless, forever. Then I remember I'm not a label placed on me by CDC because what I really am is powerful, knowledgeable, teachable, willing, and a leader right where I am today.

The truth is I was stuck in a prison of abuse, pain and fear my whole life, and upon entering CDC I found my voice and my ability to stand up for myself and for others when they can't. So as I reframe my thinking, I reach out to others and find my powerful LWOP sisters are just as driven as me to educate our community, to be free right where we are. I may never drive down the 405 freeway again but as I reframe my thinking, I walk down the highways and byways, sometimes even with traffic jams, right here at CCWF.

I know as I help my sisters learn what they need for parole I am making a difference in someone's life. I hope as you read this, you can say the same.

Rebuilding Self

If your house crumbled in an earthquake or hurricane, you wouldn't just lie down in the mud and muck and give up, saying it's hopeless and I'll never be able to rebuild my life. As we think about our families, do we put on a brave face and help them sift through what is left of their precious belongings? Start the process of rebuilding our lives? Even if we are not in it on a daily basis, of course we do.

So why is it so common among LWOPs to lie down and give up? When and how are we going to start to rebuild our community here instead of accepting that this is a walking death row sentence, without hope or a chance at redemption? We can educate and empower each other even if for some of us this may be our final destination. Are we living every moment to our fullest potential? We may not be able to go walk on the beach or drive down the freeway, yet instead I ask what are we doing with this week, this day, this minute, to live as

if freedom is obtainable? Why? Because you never know when it will be.

I know I will be ready, as I try to live in the moment. We watch our lifer sisters leave left and right. We can use this mix of emotions —happiness, sadness, grief and bittersweet pain — as a motivator to help be part of the change that together we can make as the backbone of this community. ■



Kelly Savage

Living
With
Opportunity
Power &
Perseverance

NOT

Life
Without
the
Possibility of
Parole

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the JOC inside and a number of outside organizations to convene a health fair at CCWF attended by over a thousand people in June 2015. The fair featured booths on Gender & Sexuality, Trauma & Recovery and Disability & Chronic Illness, among others. And we joined with other groups to hold a workshop at UC Berkeley called #Survived and Punished, part of a national campaign by the same name to end the criminalization of survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

CCWP's 20th Anniversary event on November 7, 2015 was a wonderful celebration of our expansive community on both sides of the walls. We honored women and trans prisoners, including many people who have transitioned over the past years. We brought formerly incarcerated survivors together from all around the state, many who hadn't seen each other for a long time. We were honored to have Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of #Black Lives Matter, and Jayda Rasberry, formerly incarcerated and an organizer with Dignity and Power Now, as key speakers. We shared reflections, music, and dance. We raffled a beautiful quilt called "Transcending" created by former political prisoner Linda Evans. We recognized our collective, powerful resilience.

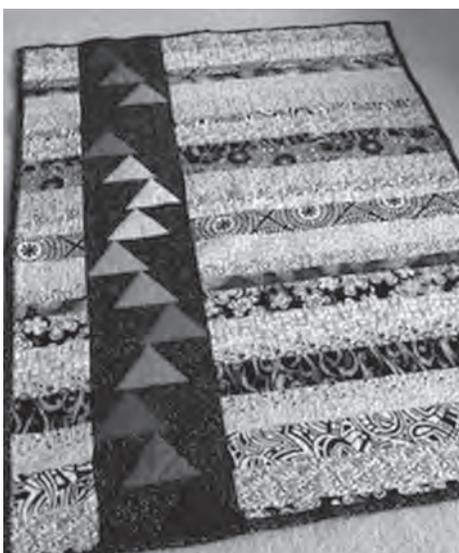
On November 11, 2015, there was a terrible assault by COs at CCWF. CCWP together with several other organizations quickly mounted a response, sending out a press release to publicize this horrible incident

(see p. 7). We are continuing to support the people who were targets of this attack. This assault was a somber reminder that the violence of the prison industrial complex has in no way subsided over the past two decades.

As we move forward into another decade, we thank all our CCWP members, writers and readers for your words, your actions and your unquenchable spirit! Together we will keep the fire inside burning! ■



"Transcending" Quilt



Linda Evans, a former US political prisoner, made this quilt to raise funds to support CCWP's work with women and trans people in CA women's prisons.

Her artist's statement:

I named our 20th anniversary quilt, "Transcending," in honor of all the women and transgender people who have survived prison by transcending and transforming the prison environment. Prisoners transcend prison walls by building community and resistance through activism in CCWP. I incorporated rainbow colors to symbolize the beauty and richness that diversity brings into our lives. The triangle shapes remind us of the determination needed to transcend and overcome oppression — during the Nazi regime, different colored triangles were used to identify and stigmatize different groups of people.

The winner of the raffle, drawn at the anniversary event, is long time CCWP member Sara Yassky. ■

Stop Death Row Harassment

by Sandi Nieves, CCWF

On May 18, 2014, CCWF instituted a wellness check procedure as a result of class action lawsuits to improve conditions in California prisons. Intended to decrease suicides, a guard checks the status of each prisoner in a vulnerable population every ½ hour. The prison installed metal buttons on the metal cell doors which COs are supposed to touch with a metal pipe to prove the prisoner's status has been checked. The COs also use flashlights to see into the cells. The noise from main doors opening and closing every ½ hour, foot stomping, banging the pipes on the doors as they hit (or miss) the buttons, beeping (indicating the check has registered) and guards shining flashlight into prisoners' faces as they are trying to sleep, turn so-called wellness checks into sleep deprivation! Prolonged sleep deprivation is recognized as a form of torture, and can lead to suicidal thinking and/or tendencies. People at prisons throughout CA are all experiencing the same harassment in the name of 'wellness checks.'

Below are excerpts from a 602 (prisoners' complaint form) filed on 24 June 2014 after the system was instituted on CCWF's death row. The 602 was accompanied by detailed records of the exact times excessive banging occurred between 6/13/14 and 7/21/14 and by whom. The 1st level review of the 602 found that because the policy states that the

checks at night are to be performed silently, therefore they are silent and the complaint was dismissed. Subsequently the 602 was "lost" repeatedly in the system.

"...We've been in [this housing unit] 504 since 1991 and have had no suicides... It's not to point fingers at who's doing the pipe wrong or loudly... because people always make errors. Some use it as a torture tactic, because we are the 'row' and should be woken, and/or treated badly.

The U.S. Federal Courts have said, 'Sleep is critical to human existence, and conditions which prevent sleep have been held to violate the Eight Amendment...' Sleep deprivation causes high blood pressure, seizures, uncontrolled blood sugar levels, stress, depression, etc. ... Many of us have histories of seizures. Flashing lights, banging on doors and lack of sleep have caused some of us to go into seizures. Some of us have had to raise/change meds just to cope, because the monitoring/banging/beeping/flashlights. We're surprised nobody's has a heart attack yet...

This is torture. We are being emotionally, mentally and physically battered by the security checks throughout the nights.

Signed by the 20 death row prisoners at CCWF ■

FiredUp! Member Released!



In Dec. 2015, Barbie Barnes was released after almost 7 years of being locked up in SF County jail. An original member of FiredUp!, CCWF welcomes her home with much love and respect. Outside FiredUp! members Adrienne & Mira were there to welcome her home.

Assault at CCWF

On November 11th, 2015 five people at CCWF faced extreme violence at the hands of prison guards (COs). Stacy Rojas and four others were detained, physically abused, sexually harassed, strip searched in the presence of male guards, and kept without water, food or restrooms for eleven hours. The group was kept in Ad Seg illegally, without a lock up order, and denied medical care for the injuries caused by these officers.

"I just want to let them know that we have been physically abused, sexually harassed," said Stacy Rojas, "and that this was just wrong. They used excessive force, totally used excessive force against us and we need help."

Right now there is increased national awareness about police use of excessive force and deadly force, and the movement to demand accountability (see pg. 10). Video and audio recordings of interactions between the police and the public have increased, but this is not an option for people behind prison walls. Any attempt to speak out is often met with retaliation and increased force (see Perez, pg. 11).

CCWP, Justice Now, the Family Unity Network, the TGI Justice Project and other advocates regularly provide legal and medical support following incidents of violence by COs at women's prisons. These organizations and Stacy's family are requesting an independent investigation of the violence and excessive use of force. We are requesting medical care and safe housing for Stacy and all those involved. We are demanding an end to the violence imposed on women, transgender people, gender nonconforming people, and communities of color within

the California prison system.

"My sister is at the end of a 14 year sentence and it seems as though some would wish to take that away. This has never happened [to Stacy] before. We have never had fear for my sister's life", said Adriana Rojas. "My sister Stacy Rojas' constitutional rights have been violated by being stripped searched by male guards, assaulted by means of kicking and stomping, taken outdoors in near 40 degree weather, threatened with rape, humiliated, placed in holding cages for nearly 12 hours, and deprived of food and water." Albert Jacob Rojas added, "They were denied medical attention and denied the right to speak to internal affairs. We ask that anybody who cares about human rights and women's rights please join us in demanding justice for all."

Family members and advo-

cates are calling for:

- An immediate independent investigation into the violence and excessive force used by guards in this incident.
- Suspension of guards involved pending investigation.
- Comprehensive medical treatment for injuries sustained during the incident.
- No retaliation for speaking out against this abuse.

CCWF Warden, Ms. Deborah K. Johnson, responded to a letter from advocates outside and acknowledged that there was an incident and that an institutional investigation is on-going. Work is also going forward to pursue legal remedies to support all of the people who were attacked and threatened. Contact Warden Johnson to express your concern: (559) 665-5531 P.O. Box 1501, Chowchilla, CA 93610-1501 ■

Art by Claudia J. Gonzalez, 2015



CCWP 20th Anniversary

At a gathering the day after CCWP's 20th Anniversary event, about 30 CCWP members ate, talked and shared memories and feelings. Here is some of what was said:

- Every one of us sitting here has Charisse Shumate to thank for being here. Charisse reached out and brought all these amazing people into the prison who just won't give up.

- Charisse had a dream to fight and she wasn't gonna give up. That's how CCWP came to be. Now I am fighting for my son, too, who is doing 50 to life. Happy (Charisse) kept bringing all of us along with her, all together.

- I met Windy (Click) inside and began following her around and learning from her. Now that I'm home, I'm here to piss the world off, and I will continue to be a voice for people inside.

- I did 18 years and almost didn't make it out. Now I will do anything to help.

- The fight for lifers is always close to my heart, from the inside and now from the outside.

- I have been raised by the people I visited. I have learned how to be fearless.

- We have to bring all of our LWOPS home.

- I have never felt more comfortable with a group of women as I do now. I was there (CCWF) for 19 years. I was 63 when I went to prison. I did every program I could and volunteered for everything because I didn't want to think about where I was. I made the best of friends in prison. CCWP was my support, my friends and my family. You made me feel like I mattered.

- All the lifers taught me how to do my time, to do it and to get out and stay out.

- We are building the kind of community and world that everyone should get to live in.

- May every anniversary bring more of our members who are inside out here with us.

- We use "family" to describe ourselves, but we are also community and so much more. Where everyone brings their capacity, their love, their ups and their downs. We make mistakes, too, but we keep going forward. ■

Thanks to Finley for all photos, pp. 8-9



Windy Click and Jayda Rasberry



Colby Lenz, Samantha Rogers and Mianta McKnight



Patrisse Cullors

Speaking Truth to Power



Karen Shain, Cynthia Martin, Mary Shields, Linda Field



Hamdiya Cooks



Heiwa Taiko Drummers, Grandmas drumming for peace



CCWP Altar Memories



All of Us or None (AOUON) Compañeros

#BlackLivesMatter Update

In 2015 we saw continued outrageous incidents of violence by police. Some of the most publicized cases of police killings were those of Charlie Keunang in L.A., Jamar Clark in Minneapolis, Mario Woods in San Francisco, and Quintonio LeGrier and Betty Jones the day after Christmas 2015 in Chicago. The November 2015 release of a suppressed video of LaQuan Macdonald's 2014 murder by Chicago police sparked new anger over the police and city cover-up. Egregious displays of violence against Black girls also occurred, including the police assault on a teenager at a pool party in McKinney, Texas and an officer body-slammng a teenage girl to the ground in a South Carolina school for talking on her cell phone. Young Black women were deliberately humiliated and violated by 'officials' in front of their peers.



There is a growing groundswell of resistance led by #BlackLivesMatter and communities of color.

Demonstrations, sit-ins, freeway shutdowns and other forms of civil disobedience have all been used to demand police accountability. On the day after Thanksgiving, protesters blocked traffic and entrances to department stores on Chicago's Miracle Mile, successfully disrupting Black Friday shopping.

Such strong actions are sure to continue until there are fundamental changes in policing policies, behavior, attitudes and culture. ■

Women Hunger Strikers at Yuba County Jail



Rajeshree Roy, 2014

On Monday December 14, 2015 women at the Yuba County Jail began fasting, joining hundreds of other detainees taking part in hunger strikes at facilities across the country. The #FreedomGiving strikes were launched on Thanksgiving by hundreds of South Asian and African detainees at three separate facilities.

The Yuba County Jail rents space to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). For the first time, women in criminal custody fasted with immigration detainees as an act of solidarity. The fasters in Yuba explained, "We are locked up together and refuse

to be divided into immigrants and citizens. None of us belong in this cage separated from our families. We join the brave immigrant hunger strikers across the country in fasting to force recognition of our humanity."

One of the fasters in Yuba County was Rajeshree Roy, an immigrant from Fiji and a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence. Rajeshree was released from after many years of incarceration at CCWF in November 2014 but was immediately picked up by ICE and placed in immigration detention in Yuba City where she has been ever since. ■

Jesse Perez Wins his Challenge of Guard Harassment

On November 25, 2015, a San Francisco federal jury awarded \$25,000 in damages to Jesse Perez who sued the state because guards trashed his cell in retaliation for a previous successful lawsuit. In 2005 Perez sued the CDCR regarding his baseless gang validation. After he won a court settlement in 2012 mandating a reevaluation of his gang status, four officers forced Jesse to strip, removed all of his legal papers and trashed his cell. In the process, one officer said, "You might have been able to win some money from us, but we will make sure that you stay [in solitary] where you belong."

Perez has been imprisoned since age 15. He was sent to the Pelican Bay SHU in December

2003 and was held there for 10 years. He took part in all three hunger strikes in 2011 and 2013, protesting prolonged isolation and demanding human rights for prisoners.

Jesse Perez said, "As prisoner



Jesse Perez (second from left) with his lawyers

activists seeking to make positive contributions to the interest and human dignity of prisoners, we understand that the trappings of power enjoyed by guards represent the biggest obstacle to significant and lasting progress." By filing the lawsuit, Perez wrote

that he sought the "opportunity to shine a public light at trial and rein-in what prisoner activists often endure in exercising their constitutional rights: the retaliatory abuse of the department's disciplinary process by prison guards."

During the trial Jesse testified:

Our system of law requires prisoners like me and many others to surrender our freedom. But our laws do not require us, and we refuse to, surrender our human dignity or the minimal constitutional rights that we retain even after crossing the prison gates.

...I think the officers' actions also represent the sort of backlash that prisoners often have to hazard when speaking out or exercising their constitutional rights. So to me, we're also here so that we can both inform and empower the public to deal with this continued corrupt course of conduct. Because in our reality, the CDCR seems incapable or unwilling to do so. ■

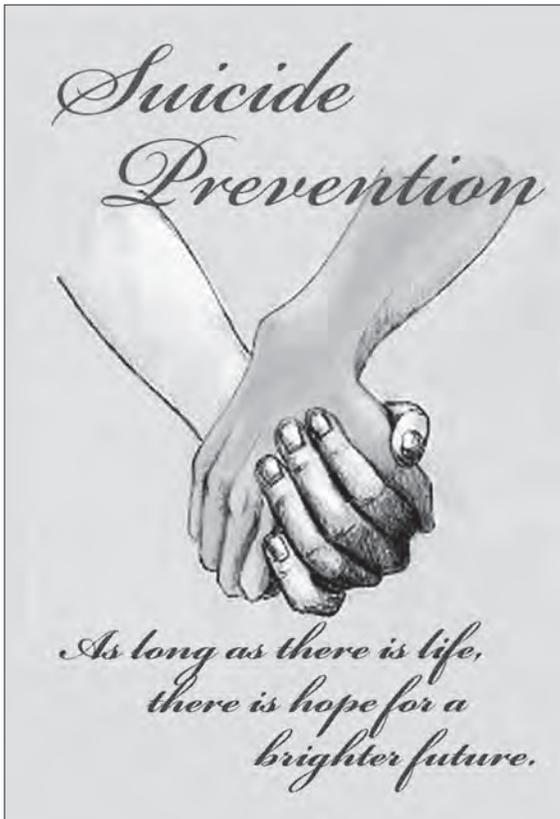
Ban the Box Campaign Victory

On November 2, 2015, Pres. Obama issued an executive order to "ban the box" that prevents federal agencies and federal contractors from hiring ex-felons. All Of Us Or None (AOUON), an organization of formerly-incarcerated people and their families, coined the term "Ban the Box" (BTB) and initiated the BTB campaign in 2003 to end the discrimination faced by millions of people with criminal records when seeking employment, housing, and other means to survive and thrive. The campaign asked cities, counties, states and the federal government to stop requiring applicants to check a box indicating that they have been arrested or convicted in the past. The President's memorandum, issued after years of advocacy led by AOUON nationally, marks a historic victory. Working with the Formerly Incarcerated and

Convicted People and Families Movement (FICPFM) and other national allies over these many years, AOUON met with representatives from the White House, the Department of Justice, and Congress.

"There are currently over 70 million people living in the United States with arrests or conviction records who are struggling to survive due to systemic discrimination we face as a population. We are grateful that our federal government recognized this publicly and did something about it," said Hamdiya Cooks-Abdullah, a co-founder of AOUON.

Dorsey Nunn an AOUON founder and Exec. Dir. Of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children said, "We want to be treated as human beings in America, despite our conviction records, and be able to feed, clothe, and provide shelter for our families." ■



This information was collaboratively developed by Natalie DeMola, CCWF Peer Health Educators and JOC, and CCWP. To receive a Suicide Prevention pocket card, write to CCWP.

UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE

- Suicidal people may not ask for help, but they may want help. Or, they may say they're going to hurt themselves & not do it right away. This doesn't mean that they won't sometime. It does mean they're in pain.
- Some people believe that when someone says they want to hurt themselves, they just want attention. Truth is, the attention they are seeking is a cry for help.
- Most suicidal people don't want to die. They want to stop hurting & can't see past whatever is causing them pain. They can't see ways to change their lives & get to a better place.
- If someone has attempted suicide, they may be feeling shame, grief or anger about having tried and still having to live with the pain. This can be one of the most crucial times to show you care & not to judge them.

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR:

- Talking about harming or killing themselves (even if they say it in a joking way but say it often).
- Talking or writing a lot about death.
- Seeking access to something they could use to hurt themselves (i.e. pills, a knife or sharp object, a razor).
- Feeling extreme hopelessness, guilt, shame or self-hatred.
- Neglecting appearance, loss of interest in day-to-day activities or showing big changes in eating and/or sleeping habits.
- Dropping out of activities they were involved with and/or isolating themselves from people they usually spend time with.

Are you worried about someone who you think might hurt or kill themselves?

- **Speak up** if you are worried. Check in with the person instead of waiting for them to come to you. **Create a safe space for someone that is thinking of suicide to talk to you. It may give them relief from loneliness and feelings of hopelessness.**
- Encourage them to get support from people they trust. Talk about activities that they enjoy, that keep them busy and might put them into contact with more people who can help (classes, committees, clubs, etc.).
- If you think someone is not just thinking about killing themselves but means it - has a plan, has gotten the things they need and/or has set a time to do it-- talk to them about it. Focus more on listening than on trying to talk them out of it.
- If possible, share your concern with others who care. Try not to leave the person alone. If there is a trusted staff member, share your concern.
- Try to support them in finding ways to get as healthy as possible in prison - eating better, relationships with people who make them feel good, exercise. Remind them of the things they care about that make them happy.
- Get support for yourself. It can be scary and hard to see someone you care about in pain and thinking about taking their own life.
- **Remember:** Many people that have thoughts of suicide feel isolated and misunderstood. If you think someone might attempt suicide, let them know they are not alone. If you have overcome suicidal thoughts, you can share that with them too.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

There are a lot of reasons that someone might consider killing themselves. Often it is because they have lost hope for themselves or something happened that throws them into a crisis. It may feel like ending their life is the only way to stop the pain. In those moments you may feel like you've hit a dead end or will never see justice or feel joy again.

Sometimes we need others to get us through those times. Here are ways for us to help each other or to get help. Let's take care of each other.

You are not alone.



Do you have thoughts about hurting or killing yourself?

Myth 1: People who talk about suicide will not really do it.

Fact: Many people who end up killing themselves have given a sign or said something. Sometimes they'll try and fail or do something that doesn't kill them but sends a sign. In both cases people may end up killing themselves at a later time.

Myth 2: If a person is determined to kill themselves, there is nothing you can do to stop them.

Fact: Many people who think about killing themselves go back and forth between wanting to live and wanting to die. Sometimes very simple actions that show you care and that help them get on a path toward making things better can save a life.

Myth 3: Anyone who thinks or tries to kill themselves is crazy or weak.

Fact: There are lots of reasons that people might want out of their situation when in prison. This does not make them crazy or weak. Some people who commit suicide are those that seemed the strongest because they didn't talk about their problems or about killing themselves until they did it. Some people think about suicide as a way of controlling their own destiny when they feel that they have no control over their lives. We hope that we can support people in finding other ways to gain control over their lives & future, even when in prison and facing long sentences.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU FEEL LIKE HARMING OR KILLING YOURSELF?

REACH OUT to your family or friends and let them know how you are feeling.

SEEK ADVICE from staff or religious leaders that you trust and feel can help you.

REACH OUT to a mentor or facilitator that you think can support you.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF your worth and your ability to make changes.

***You Are Precious
and Worthy of Healing!***

CHANGES CAN HELP

If you have tried to hurt or kill yourself, you deserve support. You can get support to make some changes you want and that help you feel better.

- If you have supportive family or friends let them know you need them.
- Get help from a professional to work on some of what led to your attempt to hurt yourself & that supports you in getting closer to your goals.
- Find things you can do to take care of yourself - eat better, build relationships with people who make you feel good, exercise. If you like to read, find inspiring books in the library.
- Join a self-help group that feels safe and explore what is causing the pain.
- Join other groups or classes that interest you.
- Get to the root of the problem in a gentle and loving way. Try not to judge yourself or be ashamed of your feelings.

Alternative Custody Program Expanded

SB 219, the Alternative Custody Program Expansion bill authored by Senator Carol Liu and co-sponsored by Justice Now (JN) and Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB), was signed into law by Gov. Brown in October 2015.

The Alternative Custody Program (ACP), created in 2011 for people in women's prisons who have non-violent, non-serious, and non-sex offenses and have 2 years or less left to serve, enables qualified people to finish their time on an electronic monitoring device in their home or in a community based program.

After its initial creation, many people reported numerous barriers to accessing the program. CCWP and JNow documented the barriers and arbitrary denials while providing advocacy to

navigate the ACP application process. This documentation allowed us to identify key areas



Mari Gray & Sarah Fontaine at 2014 SF human rights rally

to challenge and improve through legislation, and Sen. Liu agreed to author SB 219 to correct these problems.

SB 219 provides a timeline for the ACP process, an opportunity to appeal, and insures that eligible

people have a more transparent and informed process. It also removes barriers for people with existing medical or psychiatric conditions. CDCR is now required to assist ACP participants with medical coverage enrollment. SB 219 also applies to eligible people in men's prisons.

"I'm a personal testament that the Alternative Custody Program is effective in reuniting people with their families and communities," said Mari Gray, a former ACP participant. "With the help of my son, Senator Liu, and dozens of advocates,

I was able to participate in this program. There were many difficulties and disappointments I faced in my own journey towards receiving this program, so I know this bill is a step in the right direction." ■

Support Youth Inside!

Valerie Juarez, CCWF

My bunkie has been incarcerated since age 14. All she ever wanted was to be loved. She suffered major abuse in her life, starting in her home at a very young age. She was brought to a women's prison at age 18 and endured more suffering and abuse. Her mind was still that of a 14 year old. People knew that she was very vulnerable. She wanted help, but others continuously took advantage of her. It depressed her to the point of trying to commit suicide by hanging herself. A guard noticed her while doing a security check and he cut her down. She had flat lined. She spent time in the hospital recovering, and is currently alive and on meds.

Teenagers should remain at California Youth Authority until the age 25, before being sent to an adult prison. It's tragic to place them with adults who are not rehabilitated. They become easy prey and are taken advantage of mentally, emotionally, physically, not to mention, sexually.

Action Committee For Women In Prison's Pen Pal Project, Women Writing Women: Write for an application. Send a S.A.S.E to: Gellybean, 668 N. 'H' St. #2, San Bernardino CA, 92410.

Remember Us

Lynn Noyes, CCWF

We all came here due to our own choices, addictions and vices.
There was a time when we laughed and cried together,
We got angry and we survived losses together,
We healed our broken places and learned to get healthy together
We created community, unity and bonds many of us never had with our families.
Many of you received your miracles,
Received a date, affirmed and left.
You left imprints on our hearts and quite a positive legacy.
Remember how we'd all say, "Those ungrateful short termers
who come in and outta here like it's a drive thru."
"When I get mine I'll never forget you when I get out," that is what you said!
Remember us?

We just want one chance!
We' don't fall under the multitude of youth options SB260 and SB261,
Nor are we the LWOPs who are now having special awareness campaigns.
We don't meet the criteria only due to our conviction date for battering and its effects.
We are the 80-85% of first time offenders who have done all they
can and still down a daily basis for one chance.
Remember us?

I get new beginnings and living life- we're happy for you.
Back when we talked about hopes, dreams and bucket lists,
We don't except anything of course; exceptions are a set-up for failure.
But we remember when you gave your word, "I won't forget."
These are the words written in tears thinking of all who did forget.
Behind these walls, remember us!
Daughters, mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins, friends, fighting for a
chance, hoping the political and social awareness doesn't shift,
Thinking if only a few would've chosen to remember,
We are still here warehoused in the belly of the oppressive beast.
I remember there is strength in sisterhood—wished you would!
Remember us!

California Coalition for Women Prisoners invites and encourages all women and transgender people who have been or are inside women's prisons to send us your writing, letters, artwork, or poetry.

Our next issue will focus on transgender people in California women's prisons. Please send your stories, art and poetry.

We will not use your name unless you check the box below:

I want my name to appear in the newsletter

Name: _____

Mail to: _____

I would like to get the next issue of *The Fire Inside*



Network on Women in Prison
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
1540 Market St., Room 490
San Francisco, CA 94102

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Merle Africa, MOVE organization, died in prison 1978

Come work with us!

CCWP volunteer nights are on the
1st Wednesday of every month at 6 p.m.
1540 Market St., Room 490, San Francisco
Contact 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.

Funded in part by Van Lobensels Rembe Rock, Women's Foundation RGHR Giving Circle, Left Tilt, Solidago Resist, Sunshine Lady, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, Sparkplug, People's Life Fund, Morningstar Foundation

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