On Oct 1, 2016 around 100 people held a vigil outside California Institution for Women (CIW) in Chino to protest the horrendous conditions, suicides and state violence perpetrated inside.

The vigil was very powerful, with three mothers and many siblings of women who have died at CIW present. It was unifying for family members to meet with other families who had lost a child to the prison. These mothers welcomed everyone at a park a few miles from the prison, and then led the march to CIW. The marchers walked past the fence of the prison yard. People inside were quickly locked down after a powerful interchange between people inside and those outside.

Many formerly incarcerated people were present, sharing poetry and their own experiences of abuse in CIW. Jayda Rasberry, a strong community advocate and former prisoner, spoke about her friend Shadae Schmidt (Dae Dae) who died at CIW in Feb. 2014 due to medical negligence.

The cousin of Erika Rocha, who was found hanging in her cell in April 2016 after 21 years in prison, led the chanting so powerfully that people inside the prison could hear. Margie Kobashigawa, mother of 30 year old Alicia Thompson who died of an alleged suicide in Feb. 2014 in the SHU, spoke at the vigil. Margie seriously questioned CDCR’s story. She told the crowd how disrespectfully she was treated by CDCR when she tried to get information about how Alicia died. Margie told the vigil participants that this was the first time she knew that people heard her about her daughter’s death.

We will continue to keep the pressure up to make sure that our loved ones receive appropriate care and come home alive.
Propositions 62 and 66

On November 8, 2016, Californians will vote on two propositions regarding the Death Penalty. Prop 62, the Justice That Works Act, would abolish the death penalty by replacing it with Life Without Parole (LWOP). Those currently on death row would lose their rights to use the appeal process and legal habeas to get their cases reviewed. Prop 62 would also require all people serving LWOP to pay 60% of their wages to a victim’s fund. Prop 66, the Death Penalty Reform and Savings Act would speed up the review and decision process for death row appeals, resulting in a faster timeline for executions. It would also require more lawyers to take on capital appeals, whether or not they have experience with capital cases.

We strongly oppose the death penalty. We believe it is racist, classist and ableist, condemns many innocent people to death, and neither deters violence nor promotes rehabilitation. The Vision for Black Lives agenda accurately characterizes the death penalty as “designed to bring lynching into the courtroom” and as impacting primarily Black, Brown and poor people. We stand firmly against Prop 66.

We also strongly oppose LWOP, called “the other death penalty” by people serving this sentence. We believe LWOP is also racist, classist and ableist, condemns many innocent people to a slow living death, and neither deters violence nor promotes rehabilitation. The majority of people serving LWOP in California’s women’s prisons are survivors of abuse and were sentenced to LWOP as aiders and abettors of their abuser’s acts. We believe that LWOP relies on the intersections of racial terror and gendered violence.

For voters who oppose all forms of death sentences including LWOP, the choice between an initiative that replaces one form of death with another (Prop 62) and an initiative that speeds up executions (Prop 66) is hardly a choice at all. It is morally compromising to vote for Prop 62, which further criminalizes and demonizes our loved ones and creates a false hierarchy between forms of state-sanctioned death. However, we recognize that a decision to vote against Prop 62 is complicated by fear that Prop 66 will win. Ending the death penalty in California could be a powerful symbol for the rest of the country and represent a growing awareness of the injustices and inhumanity of incarceration and the criminal legal system as a whole. Every person who votes will need to make a difficult decision about two very problematic propositions.

We believe that both the death penalty and LWOP should be recognized as unjust and eliminated. One of our LWOP partners in prison, Amber, states: “To reassure people that LWOP is a better alternative to death is misleading.” Rather than facing executions, people with LWOP will die a slow death in prison while experiencing institutional discrimination. People with LWOP cannot participate in rehabilitative programs, cannot work jobs that pay more than 8 cents an hour, and will never be reviewed by the parole board. We agree with the Vision for Black Lives policy goal to abolish the death penalty and we believe that true abolition of the death penalty includes abolishing LWOP and all sentencing that deprive people of hope.

When the death penalty was temporarily banned from 1972 to 1976 by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling all people then on death row had their sentences overturned or converted to life. Many of these people successfully paroled and are now contributing to their communities. We believe that as a society we must choose to reject death penalties of all forms. Although we are dismayed that this option is not on the November 2016 ballot, no matter what happens on election day we will continue the fight to abolish the death penalty and LWOP!
Commentary on Propositions 62 and 66 from People Serving Life Without Parole

“There are women and men on death row who didn’t commit their crime and it would be an injustice to speed up the court process. LWOP is another death penalty sentence, a slow death. I want everyone to know that everyone on LWOP in the state of California [already] pays restitution. Funds are taken from the wages of an inmate or monies that are sent in from family and friends.” – Tammy

“If I had to choose one, I would choose Prop 62 but only because it is the lesser of two evils. Prop 66 just can’t be constitutional. As a practical matter, I hope neither passes.” – Amber

“I don’t think either [proposition] is enough. Last time death row [was abolished] inmates became lifers and some of those lifers are free today...so, why Life Without Parole? Why does society see LWOP as a suitable replacement? It’s still a death sentence. If death row becomes LWOP then LWOP should become life with a chance of parole.” – Amy

“We already work. Working a low wage like 8 cents an hour makes a tiny dent in restitution and only makes those working more dependent on the state to survive daily needs. An indigent LWOP would rely on the state or family (if still alive) for daily hygiene and basic needs. Higher restitution forces inmates to engage in criminal activity to tend to basic needs. Plus, a job is not rehabilitation. I’d rather have the requirement of self-help. Let’s rehabilitate human beings not treat them as trash.” – Amy

“If [Prop 62] passes anything [else] will fall upon deaf ears because [the lawyers] already feel victorious and like they have really assisted us. It stops the conversation because they feel like they’ve given us something. Lawyers and death penalty opponents can show they are fully engaged in the LWOP plight by working on another bill [for] LWOPs.” – Rae

“I don’t think [replacing Death Penalty with LWOP] is a solution. The ladies on death row sit there forever. LWOP...is an easier way to say death penalty.” – Sue

“I would like to see all bills pass for everyone. I believe everyone needs a second chance.” – LaToya

“Prove that this [proposition] is changing the system. This kind of change scares me. I’ve lost everything a long time ago. People that aren’t in prison need to sit down and listen. These sentences make us suicidal, make us go off the deep end. We are medicated to be manageable.” – Angel

“Yes, I would like to see the “Justice That Works Act” pass because nothing is solved by taking another life. Unless you’re in a losing situation (which I am as an LWOP) nothing is worse than knowing that this is forever. That no matter what, how hard you try and how much you’ve changed, you will still die in here...” – Boualy

“I feel that [replacing Death Penalty with LWOP] would work because it is a change and more people will rehabilitate and work towards giving back to society.” – Boualy

“[I’d like to see] legislation that actually works on rehabilitation or reform— we, as a society, are still focused on vengeance in my opinion.” – Amber

“LWOPs have never gotten any attention and I don’t see that changing. 60% restitution is just more punishment.” – Judith
El día 10 de agosto del 2016, después de muchos años y los últimos 6 meses de intensa lucha, El Comité de la Junta del Senado del Estado de California (JLAC por sus siglas en inglés) aprobó una petición urgente de la Sen. Connie Leyva (D, 20° Distrito-Corona) por una auditoría para examinar la política de prevención y reducción del suicidio, procedimientos y prácticas en todas las prisiones de California. El Auditor del Estado conducirá una auditoría independiente durante varios meses y dará un reporte público cuando el análisis haya sido completado. Cuatro defensoras, incluyendo gente que estuvo preso y familiares de gente encarcelada, testificaron en la audiencia acerca de la desgarradora y devastadora crisis de suicidio en CIW. Esta auditoría es una victoria para quienes están adentro, para sus familiares adentro y afuera. Son dos pasos al frente, ¡pero NO debería de tomar 3 años en tomar acciones en esta crisis!

Fire Inside ha estado reportando acerca de la crisis en el CIW por años, publicando comunicados de prensa y memorandúms legislativos desde el otoño del 2013. Desde principios del 2016, defensoras del CCWP en el área de Los Angeles has estado haciendo visitas dentro cada semana, luchando para ver a las personas que están bajo observación por suicidio, insistiendo que no pde ser “normal” en la CIW. Hemos llamado, escrito, pedido y enviado correos electrónicos a oficiales en Sacramento. A principios de agosto del 2016 los alcaides en ambas la CIW y CCWF fueron retirados sin explicaciones o críticas, aunque sabemos que su partida fue el resultado de la presión por la gente adentro, sus familiares, abogados y defensoras.

No vamos a aceptar cambios cosméticos o una auditoría del estado que culpe todo en un mal alcalde o en la gente presa. Queremos que los auditoros prueben los problemas sistemáticos para explicar porque tantas mujeres y gente trans han estado muriendo e intentando morir, porque ha tomado tanto tiempo en hacer algo en esta crisis, porque hay una cultura de violencia, degradación y desesperanza penetrada en la CIW aún más extrema de lo que sucedía antes de la conversión de la VSPW a una prisión para hombres en el 2013.

Una auditoría del estado y un nuevo alcalde NO es suficiente. Vamos a continuar elevando las problemáticas que la gente adentro dicen son las más críticas y demandaremos justicia y cambios. Estos son algunos de los cambios claves que la gente adentro quiere:

- Cambio en la Política de Abuso de la Observación por Suicidio que sólo generan aislamiento y desesperanza.
- Permitir que la Gente Provea Ayuda Una a Otra conforme se Necesite, Sin Castigo. Una cultura de cuidado y apoyo debe ser promovidas y se debe permitir su crecimiento.
- Investigar las Combinaciones de Drogas Suministradas a Gente en Unidades de Salud Mental.
- Respetar e Implementar Peticiones de Cambios de Cama para mantener a todo mundo seguro.

Esta crisis no es sólo acerca de las condiciones en la CIW. Esta refleja la violencia del estado de la policía contra gente Negra y Café en las calles de los EEUU todos los días. Esta refleja el abuso y la violencia del racismo, la pobreza, y violencia doméstica y de género afuera. NINGUN ser humano debe ser disparado por la policía sin motivo. NINGUN ser humano está hecho para vivir en jaulas. Como una sociedad, debemos buscar otras maneras de mantener a todo mundo seguro, para ayudar a que toda la gente sane.

Estamos comprometidos a trabajar para conseguir justicia para todos, y darnos ánimos para que cada uno de nosotros tomemos acciones por amor y por justicia. Envía un tweet, una carta, un fax. Apoya las acciones por justicia para todas las familias de aquellos que han sido asesinados por la violencia policiaca, como Kayla Moore y James “Nate” Greer. Vamos a seguir con la presión. DOS PASOS PARA ADELANTE. ¡No daremos un paso atrás!

Traducido por Alma Muñoz
On Aug 10 2016, after many years and an intensive last 6 months of struggle, the Calif. State Senate’s Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) approved an urgent request from Sen. Connie Leyva (D, 20th District- Corona) for an audit to examine suicide prevention and reduction policies, procedures and practices at all the CA prisons. The State Auditor will conduct the independent audit over several months and issue a public report once the analysis is completed. Four advocates, including formerly incarcerated people and family members of incarcerated, testified at that hearing about the heartbreaking and devastating suicide crisis at CIW. This audit is a victory for everyone inside, for their families inside and out. It is two steps forward, but it should NOT have taken 3 years to get action on this crisis!

Fire Inside has been reporting on the CIW crisis for years, issuing press releases and legislative memos. In 2016, CCWP advocates in the Los Angeles area have been visiting people inside weekly, struggling to see people on suicide watch, insisting that it cannot be “business as usual” at CIW. We have called, written, petitioned and emailed to officials in Sacramento. In early August 2016 the wardens at both CIW and CCWF retired without explanation or criticism, though we know their departure was the result of pressure from people inside, their families, lawyers and advocates.

We won’t accept cosmetic fixes or a state audit that lays blame on one bad warden or on imprisoned people. We want the auditors to probe into the systemic problems to explain why so many women and trans people have been dying and attempting to die, why has it taken so long to do anything about this crisis, why there is a culture of violence, degradation and despair pervading CIW more extreme than anything that was going on prior to the conversion of VSPW into a men’s prison in 2013 that caused severe overcrowding.

A state audit and a new warden are NOT enough. We will continue to raise the issues that people inside say are most critical, and demand justice and change. Here are some of the key changes people inside want:

- Change Abusive Suicide Watch Policies that only increase isolation and despair.
- Allow People To Provide Help to Each Other in Need, Without Punishment. A culture of care and support must be encouraged and allowed to grow.
- Investigate Drug Combinations Given to People in Mental Health Units.
- Respect and Implement Bed Move Requests to keep everyone safe.

This crisis is not only about conditions at CIW. It mirrors the state violence of the police against Black and Brown people on the streets of the U.S. daily. It reflects the abuse and violence of racism, poverty and domestic and gendered violence on the outside. NO human being is meant to be shot by police without cause. NO human being is meant to live in a cage. As a society, we must look for other ways to keep everyone safe, to help people change.

We are committed to working toward justice for all, and encourage each one of us to take action for love and for justice. Send a tweet, a letter, a fax. Support actions for justice for all of the families of those killed by police violence, like Kayla Moore and James “Nate” Greer. Let’s keep the pressure up. TWO STEPS FORWARD. We won’t step back!

Prisoners’ Human Rights Movement Blue Print

The Prisoners’ Human Rights Movement prepared a Blue Print for how to continue their movement. To get a copy of the 8-page introduction, write to CCWP or to Freedom Outreach/"P.H.R.M.", Fruitvale Station, PO Box 7359, Oakland, CA 94601-3023. Other parts of the Blue Print are available on request. P.H.R.M. is especially looking forward to receiving demands from folks in women’s prisons, as they would like to include the specific ways people fight/organize in those prisons.
A Poem for Erika Rocha
by Robert Filos - May 2016

AT FOURTEEN /or/ I MISS YOU

at fourteen it's a big world
i was fourteen once myself
when you are fourteen it's a big number
i have a daughter who is fourteen now
at twenty-one there is a new freedom
i was twenty-one once myself
you don't know freedom after twenty-one years in prison
i have a daughter who is twenty-one now
at fourteen your world is small
i was fourteen once myself
when i was fourteen thirty-five seemed a lifetime away
i'm fifty-three this year
i have a daughter who is twenty-one
she is getting married this year
she is still my baby
you were fourteen when you went to prison
i have a daughter who is fourteen
she is still my baby
you were in prison for twenty-one years
when i was thirty-five
twenty-one years seem a lifetime away
you were fourteen when you went to prison
you were in prison twenty-one years
you were thirty-five when you died
i never visited you while you were in prison
i never knew you Erika Rocha until today when i heard that you died in prison
you were in prison twenty-one years Erika Rocha
i miss you Ericka Rocha
i have a daughter who is fourteen now
My daughter, Shaylene Antoinette Graves, was definitely a one in a million person.

Many people are described as special, under normal circumstances but Shaylene was exceptionally special in the worst of circumstances. In past eight years, she woke up every day in “hell on earth.”

She was one of the most verbally expressive people. She could walk in a room and light it up with her humor, upbeat attitude or agenda. Shaylene was just one of those people with who you could really enjoy life.

From the time she could first speak, she was extremely perceptive. I was amazed at the things my two year old would say. She would sense your emotions and immediately address them, expecting answers. There was no hiding from Shaylene.

She was so small in stature but you didn’t even notice because her heart and drive were so big. If she loved something, you knew it. If she didn’t like something, you knew it.

Everything she committed to, you knew she was “going hard” and giving her all.

She enjoyed basketball and played on an all-boys team when she was around 8 or 9 years old. Although she was the smallest one on the court, she would take the ball to the hoop with boys a foot taller than her. Sometimes she made it, sometimes she missed, but nothing stopped her from doing what she loved.

My daughter was verbally gifted and a gifted writer as well. I encouraged her to write while she was locked up but she would tell me it was so hard to allow herself to feel in there. She said that it made you vulnerable to tap into your inspiration there and if you allowed yourself to think deeply, you would “loose it.” Still, she kept journals and I was excited to read them upon her release.

Yet, her dynamic personality could not be hidden. Ask the inmates, staff, even family members, any race both down here and upstate, Shaylene knew how to make you feel good whether it was singing, dancing, playing cards, or telling her stories. She enjoyed interacting with people but this in itself is another vulnerability when you’re locked up.

Shaylene deeply loved her son, Artistlee, but she forced herself to suppress her incessant thoughts of him.

A debt is due when an offense is committed. Shaylene, as well as her family, understood that. Prison is punishment, but that punishment should not include dehumanization of inmates or their families.

Shaylene, at age 19, had never been arrested. She never been in a gang was only 10 credits away from completing her high school diploma when she was arrested.

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Shaylene had become friends with a couple boys who had the wrong mindset. She was driving when they decided to go on a 24-hour crime spree. The boys robbed three mini marts for about $400 dollars in total. They were all caught. She was convicted and sentenced to 8 years in prison.

Although every day of incarceration was a new struggle, she did her time “well.” She participated in training for transitional care as an empowerment coach. A year ago, she wrote a business plan for her future non-profit organization called “Out of the Blue,” a resource for newly released inmates, offering the services she learned – transitional support and empowerment coaching.

Shaylene was only about 6 weeks out of completing her 8-year sentence.

I last talked to my daughter on the evening of Memorial Day. She was her usual self, asking for money on her books for a barbeque sale, asking what I was sending her to wear home, and asking what type of cell phone we would have for her when she got out.

Thirty-six hours later, I got a call, “your daughter has died in custody.” They said she was found hanging. My son said, “Shaylene would not hang herself.” The officer said, “I know.”

The prison system failed my daughter. The prison system failed her son, Artistlee. The prison system failed our family, her friends and everyone she would have blessed with her vision for her organization.

Most of all, the prison system had failed to protect her life. She lost her right to freedom in order to pay her debt to society. But, she wasn’t supposed to lose her right to life and protection while incarcerated.
The names of individuals who died in custody at CIW were displayed on mock caskets as part of the CIW Vigil in Chino on October 1, 2016.

**Care Not Cages!**

**Suicide Rates at CIW**

California Institution for Women

- **8 x** Women's prisons in USA
- **5 x** All other prisons in California

**Causes of the Crisis**

- **Overcrowding**
  In 2013, VSPW was converted into a men's prison, resulting in overcrowding at CIW.
- **Solitary Confinement**
  CIW has accelerated the use of solitary confinement since 2013, when it became the location for all Security Housing Units in CA women's prisons.
- **Mental Health Neglect**
  Lack of preventative mental health care, direct neglect by guards when people ask for help, placement in solitary confinement, and long wait lists for self-help groups are common at CIW.
- **Abusive Suicide Watch**
  Suicide watch is a traumatic practice where prisoners are stripped and clothed in a constricting gown, isolated and tortured under constant bright light.

**Suicide**

- 2016: 10
- 2017: 10
- 2018: 10
Bring Our Loved Ones Home Alive!
On July 31, 2016, over 150 people gathered at Eastside Arts Alliance in Oakland at an event titled SHOUT THEIR NAMES! A Town Hall to Take Action Against State-Gendered Violence. CCWP provided an update on the ongoing crisis at CIW and connected the violence happening inside California women’s prisons to the crisis of police violence occurring in the streets. Racist police terror is made visible by media, and the town hall made visible the violence occurring behind prison walls. These connections were powerfully illustrated during a panel discussion with family members whose loved ones have lost their lives and/or suffered violent abuse at the hands of the state. Some of these family members spoke publicly for the first time, and all gave courageous testimony.

Present were the sisters and stepmother of Erika Rocha, who committed suicide at CIW in April 2016; Sheri Graves, mother of Shaylene (Blue) Graves who died at CIW in June 2016; the sister of Rojas, who was one of several who endured abuse at the hands of CCWF guards in November 2015; and Maria Moore, sister of Kayla Moore, an African American transgender woman killed by Berkeley police officers in her home in Feb. 2013. A common theme woven by all the family members was state neglect. As one of Erika’s sisters said, “She took her life after not being able to get the help she needed. They didn’t do the things they were supposed to, and she had to pay for it. They neglected her, and now her family has to pay for it.”

At one point Maria Moore turned to the other family members and told them that while it may never get easier to deal with their loss, speaking out about it will make them stronger. Rojas’ sister stated that, “The guards say no one cares. But people do care. I am speaking to a roomful of people who care, and I want to thank you all for being here, hearing these stories and attempting to change this broken, broken system. It needs to stop. Thank you for sharing your stories, and thank you for listening and demanding change.” Later in the afternoon, former prisoners, family and community members planned next steps on taking action against state-gendered violence through legislation, by supporting people living in prison, by organizing against police-terror and in solidarity with those imprisoned, and on social media. The event drew to a close by shouting out the names of those lost to state violence and a promise to continue honoring their legacies through action!
On September 9-10, 2016, over 650 activists, family members, and allies from over 35 states came together in Oakland, CA at the historic first Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement (FICPFM) conference. CCWP was honored to participate in many of the workshops which included: Ban the Box in Employment; Family: The Most Powerful Voice; and Political Prisoners: Connecting Generations of Struggle. This was truly a high energy gathering representing years of work by people and communities most impacted by the prison industrial complex. We look forward to the growth of this movement which succeeded in putting “Ban the Box” legislation on the books in many cities, states and on the Federal level. This powerful force will bring about many more fundamental changes in the systemic discrimination that formerly incarcerated people face in all aspects of their lives.

At the FICPFM conference, CCWP also participated in an inspiring gathering of formerly incarcerated women and trans people facilitated by members of the National Council For Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women. The National Council was started on the East Coast in 2015. The two primary purposes of the Council are:

1. To ensure that no policies, laws, practices, organizing and services are made about women and girls who are or were incarcerated without including our voices, experiences and ideas for creating more effective outcomes. Our mantra is “Nothing about us, without us!” Through support, awareness and advocacy, the Council is committed to collectively building new and just policy grounded in social justice, human rights and dignity.

2. To support the work of each of us, as incarcerated or formerly incarcerated women and girls, whether we act as individuals or as organizations. The Council is a place where members support one another by sharing the knowledge and powerful experiences of the women and girls most affected by current criminal legal policies who know the realities of incarceration, the many hurdles women face after returning home, and the harm done to families and communities by the carceral state. We speak and organize from our own experiences and in our own voices.

To contact the National Council for info or to become a member please write:
Andrea C. James, NCIFIWG
42 Seaverns Avenue, Boston, MA 02130
Email: info@thecouncil.us

CCWF Suicide Prevention Update by Natalie DeMola

My name is Natalie Le DeMola and I wrote an article for the San Francisco Bay View back in December 2015 about Alissa Kamholz who attempted to commit suicide. Since that article I have been flooded with mail from inmates and non-incarcerated individuals from different parts of the United States. In these responses, many individuals have expressed their own feelings of suicide and/or they know someone that has attempted or actually committed suicide.

One male inmate wrote, “I am now surrounded by men young and old of all colors that are battling with thoughts of harm. And from an early age I always wanted to find out why. Why would a person want to end their life? I just want to do the right thing and save a life or try my hardest to save a life. I would like to join the cause and give people hope again in any way I can muster together. Will you educate me so that I can help these in need here?”

continued on p. 12
As an inmate facilitator and peer mentor here, I have dealt with many women wanting to commit suicide and finding out that their own children have attempted suicide while they were incarcerated. I have helped mothers through the guilt of not being able to be there for their child. I also have helped women heal from rape, molestation, incest, being abused in relationships, losing their loved ones, and helped them understand and deal with the fact that they started out as a victim and turned into a victimizer.

I know the hurt that is in this prison because I grew up here, but for some naïve reason I thought and maybe only wanted to believe that the pain was isolated here. I was overwhelmed with the responses that there were so many that were incarcerated that had thought about committing suicide. Most of them were men that said they didn't feel comfortable expressing their emotions to their peers or staff but wanted to tell me because I was open about my own experiences. One man actually wrote a suicide letter to me but there was no return address. My heart was so heavy that all I could do was pray. At that moment I understood and empathized with the mothers that felt helpless and could not be there for their children that wanted to commit suicide. I also understood the pain and worry that my loved ones felt every time I wanted to give up on my own life. The part that got to me the most about the suicide letter was that I could not help him and don’t know if he actually went through with it or not.

We have mental health staff that is supposed to deal with all suicide situations, but most of the time the inmate does not feel comfortable talking to the mental health staff and prefer to talk to their peers. When they tell staff that they want to hurt themselves, they are isolated in an empty room and stripped down to nothing but a suicide vest. Their only communication is with the mental health staff and they can’t talk to their friends or family on the phone. For these reasons and others, inmates are resistant to talk to staff and reach out to their peers. When we asked to be trained in suicide prevention, mental health staff stated that it would cause confusion in the roles of who responds to a suicide crisis and if inmates go to us, we may deal with the situation incorrectly.

Truth is no matter how qualified someone is, the person experiencing the crisis must feel a connection and feel comfortable with who they talk to. We inmates live together and see more than staff. We are dealing with the crisis one way or another by being around it, so we should have that education under our belt. As the male inmate wrote, “Will you educate me so I can help those in need?” That is what the institutions need, so that we can deal with those we interact with and live with daily. Help us save our peers.

I believe that if more inmates were trained in suicide prevention the suicide rate would be lower. Inmates that have been in the crisis unit with trained mental health staff and then cleared and released to general population have still killed themselves shortly after. We need to be more open to discuss sensitive issues. As we begin to dialog, it will allow those who may be suffering with self destructive thoughts to get help and support.

I have not been able to write everyone back, however as a collective response to those who wrote to me:

I want everyone to know that all of your letters were read and have influenced my vision for change. The ones who encouraged me have helped me move forward in my fight to preserve life. You are all in my prayers and your feedback has allowed me to gain other perspectives. Institutional regulations prevented my writing back to people in other prisons, along with lack of stamps and hours in the day to keep up with all the mail. You don’t need me to create the change that you want to see in this world. All you need to do is use your past pain as your gift to touch those who have suffered as you have. Give back from the place that you once have hurt and have hurt others from.

To the CCWP members and those fighting to preserve human life, I thank you for all you are doing. You all have allowed my voice to be used and heard even if serving a life without parole sentence. You have allowed my life to have purpose and I feel so honored to be a part of this movement.

Natalie DeMola X12907
512-29-3 Low
P.O. Box 1508
Chowchilla, CA 93610

July 2016

Natalie DeMola, portrait by Billie Simões Belo
Compassionate Companions Program
Suicide Awareness & Prevention

Please call us for any concerns
Members and sponsor listed on the back

If you are worried about someone you think may harm themselves

- Begin a dialogue by asking questions. Your willingness to talk about it in a non-judgmental way can be the catalyst to getting help
- Don’t be afraid to ask, “Do you feel so badly that you think about suicide?”
- Don’t try to minimize feelings, impose religious beliefs, or convince someone they have everything to live for. Do reassure them help is available and that what they are feeling is temporary and treatable
- Get help. Don’t leave someone at risk alone

You are not alone
As long as there is life there is hope

Understanding Suicide

- Suicidal people may not ask for help, but they may still want and need help
- Talking about suicide is not just for attention, it is a cry for help
- Most suicidal people don’t want to die. They want to stop hurting and can’t see past their pain
- Suicidal thoughts can carry a lot of shame, grief or anger, it is so important to offer care and concern without judging
- Guilt is a negative emotion universal to all suicide survivors, overcoming it is the greatest obstacle on the path to healing

If you need any assistance
Please don’t hesitate to call

Steering Committee Members
Jane Dorotik work Educ LA 223 Low ext 7364
Linette Luna work Peer Educ, Harrison LA 225 Low
Darlene Bourk work SAT mentor 6511/6576
Latoya Daniels work IDL MB 104 up
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California Coalition for Women Prisoners
Kayla Moore Update

Kayla Moore was killed by Berkeley Police officers on Feb. 13, 2013 in a heartbreakingly familiar—and totally unnecessary—way. Kayla was an African American, transgender, large sized woman who also lived with schizophrenia. Kayla had FOUR strikes against her when the cops were called to do a “wellness” check on Kayla at her own apartment in downtown Berkeley. A friend placed a call out of concern for her safety and wellness—a call that never should have ended up with police, but because of budget cuts and a public policy that devalues mental health care and people living with mental illness, there was no mental health crisis team to call after 5PM.

When police arrived, instead of offering care they attempted to arrest Kayla on a false warrant. They wrestled her to the ground and tried to force her body into a restraint device known as a WRAP. Under the weight of six police officers who were piled on top of her, Kayla died struggling to breathe. They did not notice that she had stopped breathing for several minutes and did not attempt resuscitation. Only through sustained community pressure were the coroner’s report and police reports released. In the police report, officers on the scene are documented referring to Kayla as “it.”

A small collective of community groups immediately organized with the Moore family and launched a People’s Investigation to respond to the police violence that took Kayla’s life. They interviewed witnesses, pressured city offices for information and policies, and read through the documents to piece together the story of what happened to Kayla. They produced their own report six months after Kayla was killed, while Berkeley’s Police Review Commission stalled for months and never seriously investigated. The peoples’ report, released by Berkeley Copwatch in October of 2013, is online at media.wix.com/ugd/9faa72_2d5720cfd6374afa811cfc2f6960238e.pdf

Kayla’s family—her sister Maria and her father Arthur—filed a civil suit against the City and the individual police officers involved. The City was quick to try to dismiss the civil suit and derailed the trial scheduled to start in October 2016. And so a courtroom battle began.

On Sept. 20th, 2016, a rally and march was held in front of the Old City Hall where the Berkeley City Council meets every Tuesday to “Shout Out Her Name” and keep the demand for Justice for Kayla and the Moore family in the public eye. Almost 100 community members took to the streets during rush hour traffic. At the October 17th hearing, the judge made a preliminary decision on the City’s motion to dismiss. The judge plans to dismiss the family’s claim of excessive force and wrongful arrest, but WILL consider the family’s claim that the Berkeley Police Department officers violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and failed to respond appropriately to Kayla’s mental health disability. The next hearing is scheduled for November 18th.

It is clear that the City of Berkeley has no intention of accepting any responsibility. They did not have the decency—EVEN ONCE—to apologize to Kayla’s family for her death. Instead, they keep blaming Kayla—she was “too fat,” she had “a preexisting heart condition just waiting to kill her”...waiting for the night when six police officers forced her face first onto a mattress on the floor of her own home, and held her there until she stopped breathing.

Shame on you Berkeley! Shame on you! Justice for Kayla! Justice for Kayla! ■
n March 2016, the two of us traveled to Palestine on a
delegation made up of anti-prison activists and former
U.S. political prisoners. Palestine is a nation in the Middle
East that has been fighting for its liberation since the state
of Israel was created in 1948 on occupied Palestinian land.
Over ten days, our delegation met with community leaders,
former prisoners, human rights organizations, and families
of incarcerated people and youth who had been killed by
the Israeli military, police and vigilantes. Throughout our
trip, we saw many similarities to the violent conditions
which Black and Brown communities endure in the U.S.

Palestinians use the term sumud or steadfastness to sum
up the strength of spirit they use to resist conditions
of occupation, including imprisonment. Many formerly
incarcerated women we met shared stories that were
examples of this steadfastness. One of them was Maysoon
Ahmad Abu Asheh, who was imprisoned at the age of 22
in 2004. Maysoon described the humiliating body searches
she endured, how the prison authorities prevented her from
visiting with her family, and that some of the women she
was in prison with were as young as 14 and 15. Maysoon
also talked about the ways that the women prisoners
organized inside, including a 2005 15 day collective hunger
strike to change prison conditions. Maysoon now works to
defend the rights of imprisoned children in Palestine.

We also met with former prisoner Rula Abu Duhou, now a
faculty member and scholar at Birzeit University in Ramallah.
While Rula was in prison, the Israeli prison authori-
ties decided to release all but five women as part of a political
deal. The women made the collective decision that if all
of them were not released, none of them would be. They
locked themselves inside two cells and refused to leave
until the Israelis agreed to free them all. They told stories
and sang songs to keep up their spirits through hungry and
crowded days. In the end they were all released! “We won
our collective freedom through collective struggle,” Rula
said.

We gave The Fire Inside newsletter to Maysoon, Rula and
others and told them we would share their inspiring stories.
Their steadfastness has strengthened our commitment to
Tear Down the Cages! Free Palestine! and Keep the Fire
Inside Burning!

Delegation Members Rachel Herzing (L) and Diana
Block (R) with former prisoner Maysoon Ahmad Abu
Sheh who is holding a copy of The Fire Inside.
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.

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