



SistersConnected

The newsletter of RECONNECT



your rights



your voice



your power

We Need Housing! by Donna P.

I was recently released to a transitional housing program after serving a seven year prison sentence. I was surprised to find that the services that I felt were promised to me were not the reality. I have not received any housing services since I have come home.

Transitional services needs better housing resources to provide us clients with a safe place to live. Presently, I only have two months left before I have to move from where I am living and the only alternative I have is to go to a shelter.

I need more time to stay where I am. Putting me and other clients in a shelter will only place us at risk of going back to prison because of the instability, drug usage and bad behaviors in the shelter system.

Whichever way you slice it, transitional housing services and the way formerly incarcerated clients are treated when it comes to housing needs to be changed.

Finding a Job after Incarceration by Marie B.

I served one year in prison where I was a mother in the nursery program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. In June 2007, I was released to a program called Hour Children. At Hour Children, I earned my G.E.D. and finished a Windows XP computer class at LaGuardia Community College. I also gained some work experience with power point and Microsoft Outlook.

So with all of my skills, why is it so hard for me to find a job after incarceration?

A job is important to me because I want to have a career and make money, but looking for one is not so great. Almost every employer asks on their job application if I have ever been convicted of a crime. I answer yes to tell the truth and some employers will not give me a second look after I answer that question. They automatically turn me away.

There is a lot of employment out there. The real question is whether employers will give the formerly incarcerated a second chance. I guess some will and some will not. There are some companies that are friendly to the formerly incarcerated and willing to hire us.

What I am trying to say is that we as the formerly incarcerated cannot give up. We have to stay focused and not give up on ourselves no matter what it takes.

Your link to
the work and
happenings of
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WOMEN IN PRISON PROJECT
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Let's Connect

inspirational messages

Recovery by Kim O.

This is what recovery means to me
As you read on you will plainly see

My life until now had charted off
course

Because I wasn't tapped into that
powerful source

I tried to do things my own way
Without allowing time to pray

As I look back on decisions I've
made

With tremendous loss I truly paid
But I kept on thinking that in time

It might pay off to commit that
crime

I can't rely on what's in my head
And only God saved me from being
dead

So to Him I turn over my life and
will

And the emptiness in my heart He
will fill

All I have to do is what feels right
And review my actions every night

It's actually not hard to do

And to myself I must be true

Because if there are secrets I want to
keep

The benefits I will not reap

So my past will become an open
book

For listeners to take a look

I want to get everything out that
blocks me in

From living a life full of sin

I try to design my thinking along a
spiritual basis

Then this world will become my
oasis

Overcoming a Troubled Life by Chante W.

Crimes involving violence led to my incarceration. I was tormented by drugs for more than 10 years. During this time, I kept my addiction a secret, lying to my family, friends, and myself. I returned home this summer and what is different is that I have a network. I currently live with my mom and brother. My life consists of work, school and family. I also attend an outpatient program twice a week. I am being productive and open to learning anything new.

Reflections By Dolly W.

After 25 years of jail and prison, I had to really set some boundaries this last time. Most of my adult life I've spent going back and forth to jail or prison, doing the same thing over and over. This time I said, "You really have to find a solution to your problem." I decided that I wanted to parole to Greenhope Services for Women, an alternative to incarceration drug treatment program. My mother and sister were shocked, but told me that I had their full support. It's rough, but I can honestly say so far, so good. Living life on life's terms is what I intend to keep doing.

Survivor By Shanay

I was once walking through a black tunnel leading myself down a road of self-destruction. I became a young drug dealer. I was in and out of the system every two months, becoming a statistic, until one day I got rescued. I surrendered and went to an inpatient drug program and learned to eat humble pie. I changed my whole way of thinking and learned to stand for something. Today I have completed my program and I have my G.E.D. and my driving permit. I am also in a job training program. I am now somebody.



ReCONNECT Spotlight

The Voice of My Child by Brunilda R.

I would like to share a story about my family. There was a time when my son J and I were separated due to my incarceration. It broke our home and our relationship, which we are struggling to rebuild. My son was 7 years old when he was placed in foster care. During that time he was confused about the circumstances that landed him there. He had to shuttle between three foster homes until he was placed in one where he remained until I returned home.

J went through a lot in the foster home. As I piece together the puzzle of what happened during the time we were separated, I am discovering that my son was emotionally and physically abused. J has a hard time sharing what went on during this time. When we are sitting at home he will share his thoughts—how he was deprived of food as punishment; how he was sexually exploited by an older child; how roaches

crawled on him while he was sleeping; and how he was hit with a wet belt. J appears to block out the events, but the thoughts intrude.

As J and I struggle to come together again, these memories are in the background. Trust and communication can be difficult. We work on our unity every day, and some days are better than others. As a parent, I attempt to have him involved in positive activities, such as Boys Club, therapy, religious education, and advocacy programs. I do not want J to be afraid to tell his story to others. I want J to know that it is okay to speak his mind in a positive way and that he is not alone. I will always have his back.



Join Us in 2010!

The Coalition for Women Prisoners will kick off the New Year with our general meeting on **Thursday, January 7, 2010, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.** at the Correctional Association of New York. If you are new to us, we encourage you to come to our New Members Orientation at 4 p.m. where you can learn more about how the Coalition works.

We are excited about what 2010 has in store as we continue with our exciting projects and prepare for our legislative visits.

For more information, please contact Stacey Thompson, Coalition Associate, at (212) 254-5700 x333 or by E-mail sthompson@correctionalassociation.org.

Thank you Peer Leaders!

Anisah

Linda

Lisa

Mayra

Maxine

Tina

Twanda

SupportReConnect

The articles for this issue were written by members of the ReConnect Fall 2009 class. Congratulations to:

Marie, Vernetta, LaDeamMa, Kim, Shanay, Donna, Brunilda, Chante and Dolly.
(*Photograph courtesy of Mayra Collado*)



MAKE A DONATION

Please consider donating to ReConnect, the leadership training program for formerly incarcerated women at the Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York. All contributions are tax deductible. Send a check made out to "The Correctional Association" (with a note on the check that it is for ReConnect) to 2090 Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, Ste. 200 A, New York, NY 10027, or make a secure online donation at correctionalassociation.org.

Thank You!

GOT JOBS?

Interested in adding a professional, hardworking, reliable, collegial woman to your team? ReConnect women want to put their skills to work! If you or someone you know has employment opportunities available, email Andrea Williams, ReConnect Program Director, at awilliams@correctionalassociation.org and we will post the job announcement to our list serve.