

CA Bulletin

160 Years as a Force for Progressive Change in the Criminal Justice System

Fall 2005

Rights for Incarcerated Youth

Juvenile Justice Project Tackles Harassment and Discrimination

All young people deserve to live free from intimidation, harassment and abuse, especially from the people who are supposed to be guarding their welfare. But for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth who are confined in New York detention centers, this basic human right is too often compromised. The New York Juvenile Justice Coalition, which the CA's Juvenile Justice Project coordinates, is the only juvenile justice coalition in the country striving to ensure the safety of LGBT youth involved in the court system.

Many LGBT youth are homeless, having been rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation. On the street, they are vulnerable to physical violence, drug addiction and forced prostitution. After they are arrested, their situation is often even bleaker: in jail, LGBT young people regularly face verbal and physical harassment—not only from their peers, but from facility staff as well.



Margaret Loftus, Juvenile Justice Project Associate, conducts a training on LGBT issues.

And there's usually little they can do about it. The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which manages New York's juvenile detention centers, does not recognize sexual orientation or gender identity in its anti-discrimination policy, so there is no official avenue for young people to get help or to escape an abusive, potentially violent situation. Even sympathetic staff members can't always provide proper care, because they haven't received sufficient training.

In addition, LGBT youth are often placed in more restrictive settings, either in an effort to protect them from abuse or based on the incorrect assumption that they are more likely than a heterosexual youth to "act out" sexually. This practice means that as a matter of policy, LGBT youth are being treated more harshly within the system simply because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The Juvenile Justice Coalition is working to educate the public about these issues and to change policy. Many people are not even aware that these problems exist, so the Coalition is collaborating with a filmmaker who is making a short documentary about LGBT youth in jail. To be completed in the fall, the film should be a powerful advocacy tool, allowing viewers to hear LGBT youth speak in their own words about the discrimination they've faced.

continued on back page

A week in the life

of a gay youth in jail

The following is an excerpt from the journal one young man kept to document the harassment he experienced while incarcerated. Sadly, such fear, intimidation and physical danger is too often a regular part of life for LGBT youth in custody.

April 8: The sexual harassment starts again. The staff does things to get the kids to retaliate against me. Everybody is...verbally assaulting me.

April 9: More harassment today. One staff called me a "stupid faggot." ... I tried to complain, but I got ignored.

April 10: Harassment continues, I complain but they don't take it serious, I'm afraid it might get out of hand. Boys are trying to touch me and stuff, but staff does nothing. I feel like I live in hell. This evening was filled with violence... I fear for my safety.

April 11: More harassment. A staff stated "I hate gay people." I got steadily ridiculed [and] verbally abused. I fear them.

April 13: I expressed myself to a counselor but [she] would not do anything. I have told her before. I isolated myself from the kids' vicious behavior.



~ Letter from the Director ~

Frustration and Reward

by Robert Gangi, Executive Director

Given the nature of our work, frustration is an enduring reality at the CA. In fact, one's ability to deal with the inevitable disappointments that come with the territory here—to recognize them and get past them—is a critical test. Score well on it and you have taken an important step to becoming an effective advocate for criminal justice reform.

Some of our recent frustrations have involved our Drop the Rock effort to repeal New York's harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws—in terms of both the relatively little movement in Albany and our inability to raise money to fund and staff the work. But a welcome change is upon us. A modest grant has enabled us to hire a part-time staffer, Simone Levine, a talented and energetic Legal Aid lawyer on sabbatical, to breathe new life into Drop the Rock.

We are undertaking the kinds of activities needed to build a single-issue organizing campaign: preparing a new petition and getting as many signatures as possible, developing new public education materials like colorful hand-outs and buttons, tabling street fairs and other public events, arranging presentations to community groups around the city, preparing voter education guides outlining candidates' positions on drug law reform, and updating the Drop the Rock website.

Our goal is to draw attention to the issue again and to build momentum for enacting meaningful reform in next year's legislative session. 2006 is an election year for all state office holders and is viewed as an opportune time for successfully pressing political figures who now want to be on the right side of this issue. (To maintain this effort, however, we do need to raise additional funds to support a full-time advocate who can work with us at least through June of 2006.)

Reflecting our diverse yet integrated set of activities, we have other important items on the CA's legislative agenda for next year. We will advocate for a range of substantive bills, from ending the prosecution of sexually exploited young people (Juvenile Justice Project), to closing gaps in medical and mental health care when inmates are released (Women in Prison Project), to prohibiting the isolation of inmates with mental illness in segregated housing units (Prison Visiting Project)—and several more of similar importance.

Partly due to our coalition-building and related advocacy efforts, all these bills made significant advances in the 2005 legislative session. They gained influential sponsors in one or both legislative houses, and three passed in the Assembly. We are determined to intensify the pressure and see to the enactment of these bills.

Each bill passed represents a step made toward the CA's vision, shared by many, of a more fair, efficient, and humane criminal justice system. Each bill passed corrects an injustice and/or improves a policy: inmates will receive better treatment, former prisoners will have more of a chance to succeed on the outside, urban communities of color will have more support for their efforts to break free of the cycle of poverty, crime, and incarceration. The frustrations we regularly encounter at the CA pale in their effect when placed alongside those possible rewards.

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Who I Will Be...

A Benefit for the CA's Women in Prison Project

On May 11, supporters of the Women in Prison Project gathered for a unique benefit at HBO's event space overlooking Bryant Park in New York City. After enjoying cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, guests settled in HBO's theater for music, poetry and spoken word, including a moving performance by several graduates of ReConnect, the Project's leadership training program for formerly incarcerated women (see page 5).

CA Executive Director Robert Gangi began the evening by welcoming audience members and featured guests, and introduced Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of the *Nation* and CA Board member, who spoke eloquently about the importance of the Women in Prison Project. Composer Tiye Giraud performed her own vocal and percussion piece entitled *Sorceress*. Playwright Eve Ensler shared a monologue about her experience teaching writing classes for women at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, and actor Hazelle Goodman read a poem written by Norma Stafford, an incarcerated woman confronting her experiences through writing.



Playwright Eve Ensler, WIPP Director Tamar Kraft-Stolar, actor Hazelle Goodman and WIPP Associate Jaya Vasandani.

The Project's Community Outreach Coordinator Stacey Thompson emceed the evening, and staff members Tamar Kraft-Stolar, Jaya Vasandani and Andrea Williams spoke about various substantive aspects of the Project's efforts.

The highlight of the evening was the performance of "Who I Will Be," a spoken word piece written by Carol Baldwin, Cathy Faust, Lorraine Patterson, Anisah Thompson and Stacey Thompson, all graduates of ReConnect. The piece was created during a series of workshops facilitated by Project Communications Consultant Kathy Engel and Tiye Giraud. It offered a poignant glimpse into the complexities of post-prison life, capturing the serious challenges women face upon release and their extraordinary potential to be advocates for social change. Susan L. Taylor, Editorial Director of *Essence Magazine*, closed the evening by urging the audience to continue to support the Project's vital work.



Thank you to everyone who participated in the event!

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to HBO, especially Richard Plepler and Jana Herman Madarash; Patrick Fenton and Willy Schwenzfeier of Swayspace for design and printing; and our honorary chairs: actors Minnie Driver, Danny Glover, Diane Keaton, Mercedes Ruehl and Susan Sarandon; actor/director Bob Balaban; playwright Marsha Norman; former State Senator and CA Board member Catherine M. Abate; and former New York City Council Member Ronnie Eldridge. We are also deeply indebted to our benefit committee for their generous support: Elizabeth Horton, Ann E. Lewis, Alexander Papachristou, Joan Steinberg, Gregg A. Walker, Jan Warren and Monica Winsor.



Anisah Thompson, Lorraine Patterson, Cathy Faust, Carol Baldwin and Stacey Thompson perform "Who I Will Be."

For more information about the Women in Prison Project and ReConnect, please contact Tamar Kraft-Stolar at 212-254-5700 ext. 306 or tkstolar@correctionalassociation.org.



1844 Medal Award honoree Agibail Disney and Karena Gore Schiff.



Board Chair Jim Silbert, Honoree Ira Glasser, David Dinkins and CA Executive Director Bob Gangi.



Board members William Dean, Joan Steinberg and Leroy Frazer.

1844 Medal

On June 8, the Correctional Association honored Abigail Disney and Ira Glasser at the 15th annual 1844 Medal Award dinner. The event was held at the Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers, where guests enjoyed good company, delicious food and panoramic views of the Hudson River. Thanks to the generosity of our honorees, friends and guests, we surpassed our financial goals for the evening.

Abigail Disney received the *1844 Medal* for her dedication to seeking out and supporting creative solutions to the social problems facing marginalized communities. The founder and current president of the Daphne Foundation, Ms. Disney is a longtime supporter of the CA's Women in Prison Project. She spoke about the link between privilege and social responsibility, and of her determination to help address the problem of poverty and other social ills that disproportionately affect women.

Ira Glasser received the CA's first *Lifetime Achievement in Advocacy Award* for his unflagging dedication to the principles of liberty and equality during his 40-plus years as executive director of the ACLU and NYCLU. He spoke about how the ongoing struggle for racial equality lies at the heart of all civil rights work, which echoed CA Executive Director Bob Gangi's remarks about the unstinting vigilance that prison reform efforts require.



Juvenile Justice Project interns Kean Jones and Diamond Dessaline with Board Chair Jim Silbert.



Guests Linda Soberal, Charlene Burnett and Anisah Thompson.

Award Dinner

Karena Gore Schiff introduced Ms. Disney, graciously stepping in for Gloria Steinem, the scheduled speaker, who was unable to attend due to illness. Former mayor and 1844 Medal recipient David N. Dinkins provided an eloquent introduction for Ira Glasser.

The audience also heard from two people new to the criminal justice reform movement: Diamond Dessaline and Kean Jones, who introduced Ms. Gore Schiff and spoke about their experiences in the CA's Each One Teach One youth leadership program. As graduates of Each One Teach One, they helped train the youth who attended the Juvenile Justice Coalition's Advocacy Day (see page 7) on how to be strong advocates.

Together, the speakers embodied the spirit of civic involvement and impassioned action that has motivated the CA for 160 years. Ms. Disney and Mr. Glasser are true testaments to our conviction that the ideas and dedication of individual citizens can make a significant difference in the way our society addresses its most difficult problems.

For more information about the 1844 Medal Award dinner, please contact Susan Gabriel at 212-254-5700 ext. 309 or sgabriel@correctionalassociation.org.

After ReConnect

Alumnae Host Leadership Summit

On July 23rd, the ReConnect Alumnae group held their first Leadership Summit to help ReConnect graduates stay connected to each other, to the Women in Prison Project and to advocacy work. The summit was coordinated by ReConnect alumnae, ReConnect Program Coordinator Andrea Williams and Community Outreach Coordinator and ReConnect alumna Stacey Thompson. It provided an opportunity for graduates to discuss effective ways of balancing the responsibilities of work, family, school and community as they engage in grassroots activism and build their skills as leaders in the criminal justice reform movement.

The group was joined by representatives from the Women's Advocacy Project, an advocacy training program run by the Women's Prison Association (WPA), and Patricia Zimmerman, Policy Associate with Family Justice and member of Women on the Rise Telling Her Story (WORTH), an association of formerly incarcerated women.

A highlight of the day was a performance and workshop conducted by Blackout Arts Collective, a group of activist artists who work to empower communities of color through the arts. In the workshop, entitled "Movement Building In and Out of Prison," participants learned how to use creative expression as a tool for personal and community activism.

During the coming year, ReConnect Alumnae will play a key role in organizing the Coalition for Women Prisoners' 2006 Advocacy Day by conducting educational trainings and leading teams of advocates to meet with state legislators.

Special thanks to the Blackout Arts Collective, WPA's Women's Advocacy Project, Patricia Zimmerman, Dorothy Withers, who cooked all the delicious food, the ReConnect Alumnae Group and the Correctional Association staff for their help in making the Leadership Summit a success.

For more information about ReConnect, please contact Andrea Williams at 212-254-5700 ext. 338 or awilliams@correctionalassociation.org.

Researching Abuse in New York Prisons

The Prison Visiting Project (PVP) has initiated an intensive, six-month study of the nature, scope and causes of abuse in New York's prisons. We are conducting this study in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal in Iraq. Shocking photographs of the brutality there, as well as ongoing evidence of prisoner abuse at the Guantánamo detention center, sparked outrage in the United States. It became impossible to deny that grave problems exist in institutions managed by American troops.

After 160 years of monitoring New York prisons, the Correctional Association is all too aware of the kinds of abuse that can occur inside closed institutions. While the CA cannot bring cameras into prisons, we can do the next best thing: observe what few can see and bring our findings and recommendations to the light and scrutiny of public view. Our role, in effect, becomes that of society's camera.

Although we have little reason to believe that prisoners in New York routinely suffer from the kinds of humiliation reported in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, we know that abuse of inmates, violating basic human rights, does take place here. From physical assaults to the deliberate denial of food, light and water; from the excessive confinement of inmates in 23-hour isolation for violating prison rules to widespread retaliation for filing com-

plaints; from the exploitation and mental deterioration of inmates with mental illness in lockdown to the denial of needed medical care for those with serious illness, abuse exists in many forms.

Based on our unique legislative mandate to monitor New York prisons, the CA will use its access and expertise to get at the heart of this problem, conducting inmate interviews and discussions with prison staff. We will also seek Department of Correctional Services' documents detailing the nature and extent of violence in the system and its response to allegations of abuse. Our work is informed by a national committee of advisors with experience in correctional issues, violence prevention and prison management.

Additionally, we are examining the mechanisms New York uses to measure and address problems of abuse, assessing the degree to which the state adheres to internationally recognized human rights standards. We are identifying the factors that contribute to abusive or safe environments in prisons, such as the training and supervision of officers, the demographics of inmates and staff, video surveillance, inmate idleness and disciplin-

ary practices such as solitary confinement and use of force. Finally, we will discuss the advantages of the CA's watchdog role and identify methods of introducing our model of independent oversight in other states.

Our research will result in a detailed report of our findings and recommendations for establishing safer, more humane and more manageable prison environments. We will present our conclusions in testimony before the recently established, national Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons and engage in a concerted effort to have the report become an important part of the country's discourse on prison abuse. We will also publicize this work in other forums as a way to advocate for constructive changes in New York prisons.

We encourage formerly incarcerated individuals and family members of inmates who have experience with this issue, positive or negative, in a New York prison, to contact Jack Beck at 212-254-5700 x 310 or jbeck@correctionalassociation.org, or write to 135 East 15th St., New York, NY, 10003. All calls and correspondence will be kept strictly confidential.

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Appreciation and Welcome: Outgoing and New Board Chairs

After three years of thoughtful and determined leadership, James Silbert stepped down as chair of the Correctional Association's board in June. The CA grew substantially during Jim's tenure, almost doubling in staff size and attaining the largest budget in our long history. This growth sometimes brought challenges, and Jim handled them with unfailing patience, intelligence, and an impressive ability to build consensus.

We are enormously grateful for Jim's period of service and value his continued contributions as a member of the board.

We welcome John M. Brickman as our new board chair. John has served on the board since 2000 and is a partner of Ackerman, Levine, Cullen, Brickman & Limmer. He served as Executive Director of the New York City Board of Correction in the early 1970s and has

since remained active in the field of prison reform and criminal justice. John graduated from Columbia Law School and received his BA from Johns Hopkins University. Given his blend of sound judgement and responsible leadership, we look forward to working with John and are confident that the CA will flourish during his tenure.

Advocates Speak Out for Youth and Women

The Coalition for Women Prisoners, coordinated by the CA's Women in Prison Project, held its 11th Annual Advocacy Day on March 8th—International Women's Day. Despite a blizzard, the event was a terrific success: over 200 formerly incarcerated women and other advocates met with 100 state legislators and their staff to advocate for the Coalition's 2005 priority issues.

Assemblymember Jefferson L. Aubry, Chair of the Committee on Correction and sponsor of the Coalition's Advocacy Day, started off the day's program at Westminster Presbyterian Church by encouraging participants to share their concerns and personal experiences with legislators. Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin, a program director at the Women's Prison Association, was chosen as the speaker for the lunchtime program, in recognition of her exemplary work as an advocate and her dedication to improving the lives of formerly incarcerated women.

Each of the 30 lobby teams gave legislators information about the Coalition's

legislative priorities, a set of fact sheets about women incarcerated in New York State prisons, and the February issue of the national publication, *Women, Girls and Criminal Justice*, which was devoted almost entirely to the Coalition's work.

Three weeks later, the Juvenile Justice Coalition, coordinated by the CA's Juvenile Justice Project, traveled to Albany for its Advocacy Day on March 29. Over 200 young people, parents and other advocates met with 75 state legislators and their staff.

The advocates highlighted the need for far-reaching juvenile justice reforms in New York. Formerly incarcerated youth had the rare chance to speak directly with legislators about the abusive and damaging treatment they received while in state custody.

"Instead of locking up youth who are charged with low-level offenses or who have been sexually exploited, New York must create more effective alternatives to jail," said Mishi Faruquee, Juvenile Justice

Project Director and one of the organizers of the event. "Furthermore, the state must adopt measures to protect incarcerated youth from abuse and discrimination."

Advocacy Days are an impressive way to demonstrate the commitment of our coalitions, but they would mean little without concerted follow-up. In the months following our lobbying efforts, project staff compiled information gathered by advocacy teams and followed up with letters to and meetings with key State Assemblymembers and Senators.

These efforts have brought about positive results. For example, the Coalition for Women Prisoners' bill to allow merit time for survivors of abuse convicted of defending themselves against their batterers was introduced in both the Assembly and Senate.

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who participated in these Advocacy Days—you have truly made a difference.

For information on the 2006 Advocacy Days, or to join a coalition, please contact us at 212-254-5700 or info@correctionalassociation.org.



Members of the Coalition for Women Prisoners read the group's 2005 Call to Action.



Over 200 young people, parents and other advocates attended the Juvenile Justice Coalition's Advocacy Day.

LGBT Youth in Jail continued from page 1

In the spring, the Juvenile Justice Coalition's LGBT working group held a training on LGBT issues for all Coalition members, an important step in our advocacy work, ensuring that Coalition members understand the basic issues at hand. In addition, the working group organized a special training last fall to help defense attorneys better represent the needs of LGBT clients in Family Court.

Members of the LGBT working group are also collaborating with the Family Court Advisory Council to design a system-wide training on LGBT issues for everyone who is involved in the juvenile justice system in New York City. This day-long training will raise awareness of the issues facing LGBT youth and help create a safe environment for youth in juvenile justice settings. In addition, training leaders will distribute a curricu-

lum that attendees can use to teach their staff about these issues.

The Coalition has developed a positive relationship with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), which runs New York City's youth detention centers. Recognizing the severity of this problem, the Department has voluntarily drafted an anti-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity. In addition, members of the Juvenile Justice Coalition have been conducting regular trainings at DJJ about these issues.

The Correctional Association applauds the initiative with which DJJ is addressing the needs and rights of LGBT youth—not only because it is the right thing to do, but because its policy will serve as a model for other agencies.

In the next year, the Juvenile Justice Coalition will press OCFS to adopt a policy similar to DJJ's. The Coalition will still advocate for the Safe, Fair and Equal Treatment for Youth (SAFETY) Act (A.6502), which will ban all forms of discrimination in state juvenile justice facilities and require OCFS to provide staff training to address homophobia and to protect the rights of LGBT youth confined in its facilities. Between these two approaches, we expect that OCFS will eventually take a stand against all types of discrimination and give its staff the tools they need to promote a safe environment for all youth.

For more information about the Juvenile Justice Project, please contact Mishi Faruqee at 212-254-5700 ext. 315 or mfaruqee@correctionalassociation.org.

Thank You for Your Support

You can make a difference in prison conditions by making a gift to the Correctional Association.

Because it is our mission to hold the criminal justice system accountable for its policies and practices, the CA receives very little government funding. We rely on contributions from concerned citizens like you who share our determination to create a just and humane society.

You can help ensure that we stand strong in our advocacy on behalf of the men, women and youth caught up in the criminal justice system. To support the CA via credit card or check, please complete the enclosed reply envelope or call 212-254-5700.

A truly meaningful way to support the CA is with a planned gift. From including the Correctional Association in your will to setting up a charitable gift annuity, planned gifts help ensure that the Correctional Association will be a voice for the voiceless for decades to come.

If you are curious about how planned giving can further your own financial goals while providing for the future of the Correctional Association, please contact Susan Gabriel at 212-254-5700 ext. 309 or sgabriel@correctionalassociation.org.

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