



SistersConnected

The newsletter of RECONNECT



your rights



your voice



your power

Transitions

By Jennel

My name is Jennel. I am a leader and fearless advocate.

I spent 11 years in prison and am recently released. Coming home, one of the major struggles that I face is finding affordable, permanent housing. In order to qualify for permanent housing these days, you either have to be a mother with a child, a domestic violence victim, have mental health issues, have substance abuse issues or have HIV/AIDS.

Fortunately, I don't have any of those issues. However, being an ex-felon only affords me temporary housing. In situations with temporary housing the time I have to get on my feet, get a

job, save money to at least rent an affordable room is not afforded to me.

These temporary housing situations tell you in the beginning that you have up to one year to find housing. But two and a half months later they tell you that they need you to leave sooner rather than later because they need your room to house a person with children.

Living day by day wondering when I am going to be asked to move out of my room and go to a shelter (perhaps) only magnifies and intensifies the struggle of being a formerly incarcerated woman who is making positive changes in her life.

One of the major struggles that I face is finding affordable, permanent housing.

ReConnect supports the advocacy of MFY Legal Services, Neighbors Together Three Quarter House Organizing Project and other advocates fighting to improve the rights and living conditions of people in three quarter houses throughout NYC. For more information about what is happening and how to get involved, contact MFY Legal Services at (212) 417-3705/www.mfy.org or TOP at Neighbors Together (718) 498-7256

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

inspirational message

Flashbacks

By Colby

Life flashes before her eyes
The terror of a child
Who was taught things
She didn't understand
But knew were wrong
He said she was good
Why wasn't she supposed
to tell?

Life flashes before her eyes
The anger in a teenager
Who did tell
And was made to feel
It was her fault
She was no good
Damaged
Dirty
Full of shame
Why did no one hear her
cry out?

Adulthood in numbers only
She is still the child
terrorized
Still the teen full of anger
Numbing the hurt with
anything that works
Bad love the only kind she
knows
Giving to everyone first
leaving herself behind

Life flashes before her
eyes
It does not belong to her it
feels way too late to fix
But she tries just the same
Going back when he calls
asking for her help
She says I'm good
I can make it right with
forgiveness

It is not forgiveness he
wants
It is revenge
He has suffered more than
she but cannot blame
himself
He knows she is fragile
If he pushes just a little bit
more he can take her with
him

Life flashes before her eyes
And in that flash his life is
gone
In that flash hers has
begun
She is free in prison
There are no more secrets
she has finally told
The whole truth and
nothing but the truth

Life flashes before her eyes
It will no longer pass her by

Change of Life By Maria

It started at age 19 when I had my first child. I had turned to drugs. As the years went by I had four more children and a whole lot more drugs. All of my kids were put in foster care and I did not see them until I was 25 years old. I was pregnant with my sixth child. I was also in prison. However, this time I was clean of drugs.

I was facing three years in prison. I was alone and scared of losing another child to the system. Then I got a letter saying that I was approved for the nursery at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. This changed my life. I met so many wonderful people that are still in my life. I met people in the nursery, at Hour Children (which runs the nursery) and the Correctional Association. In the nursery I learned how to be a mother and how to love myself.

Today, four years later, I have to say thank you to the nursery at Bedford Hills, Hour Children and the Correctional Association for all of the help and support as a mother in recovery. If it wasn't for them I don't know where I would be today.

To learn more about the state of health care for all women in the New York State prisons, see the CA's Women in Prison Project 2015 report:

<http://www.correctionalassociation.org/resource/reproductive-injustice>



ReCONNECT Spotlight



**Coalition
Corner**
UPDATE FROM THE COALITION
FOR WOMEN PRISONERS

Oasis By Gisele

Two weeks before release, I was still nervous about what to do when I met new people. The mere thought could suddenly turn my hands into popsicles. I told my therapist that one side of me wanted to introduce myself very boldly and bravely, just like an HIV positive dude had done during a Halloween party almost 20 years ago. While shaking my hand he said, "Hi. My name is Bold. I am gay, HIV positive and have AIDS. Every day I drink a drug cocktail to keep me alive. It is made with 22 different kinds of medications. How about you? What's your name darling?" Just like that. Fearless, no strings, no shame, no hiding. I bravely gave it a chance and trained once or twice in front of the dummy mirror in my cell. (Well, it supposedly serves as a mirror but you can hardly identify who you are, which actually helped me with my inhibitions as I could trick myself into thinking I was someone else.) And before I finished the first half of my second attempt, I was sure that it was not going to work. Gigi was still there, but there was no hint of GigiBlazeNY yet.

With that frustrated mirror experience in the back of my mind, I stepped through the prison gates back to freedom. On parole one is not really free but that gate crossing felt pretty free to me. I brought my 5 bags full of grievance paperwork, met my parole officer, peed in a cup and got home, safe into civilization again--no handcuffs, no shackles, no slave masters. My first meal in freedom: a delicious banana. I was happy not to wake up several times during the night hearing the officer's keys continuously bumping into one another at every step or being thoroughly bathed with their flashlights every half an hour. My pillow felt amazingly fluffy and my covers were wonderfully soft. For the first time in three years I could experience complete peace and deep sleep. I was knocked out for two days.

While going to church on Sunday morning, in the car squeezed between my mother and some new friends, I prayed for nobody to mention the word *prison* or to ask me questions regarding what I have been doing or where I had been for the past three years. I simply did not have an answer. The most clever bundle of words I could think of would have been: "I was away traveling around in a long retreat."

Being part of ReConnect changed my perspective. There I was heard. I could say I had been in prison because that's why I was accepted in the program in the first place. If I had never been incarcerated, I would never be in this program. I felt the warmth of a cuddling group of sensitive, wonderful women. It was one of the most nurturing, empowering and supportive groups I have been in!

Coalition for Women Prisoners Meeting and Summer Party

Tuesday, August 4, 2015

5:00 - 7:00 PM

All meetings are held at the
Correctional Association of
New York, 2090 Adam
Clayton Powell Boulevard, 2nd
floor, NYC.

Take the 2/3 or A/B/C/D
train to 125th Street station.

Contact Anisah Sabur at
(212) 254-5700 x334 for
more information.

Got leadership skills?

ReConnect is the CA Women in Prison Project's advocacy and leadership development training program for adult women transitioning home from prison or jail or an alternative to incarceration program. If you are a formerly incarcerated woman who is recently home from prison, jail or an alternative to incarceration program and you are interested in social justice advocacy, apply to ReConnect. To learn more, contact Andrea B. Williams, ReConnect Program Director at (212) 254-5700 x338 or awilliams@correctionalassociation.org for a brochure and application.

Congratulations Spring 2015 Class!

Aurora, Bernadetta, Colby, Gisele, Jennel, Maria, Maymunah, Miriam, and Turgeraye

