

prison health news

-better health care while you are in and when you get out-

Issue 3, April 2004

Who We Are...

We are on the outside, but we were inside before. We've been where you are now and know what it's like...and survived it. We are ex-offenders talking about health issues and trying to bring about a positive change for all people who are in prison now or ever have been in the past. This newsletter is about all of us.

We will be talking about health issues. For example, what is good nutrition? Where can you get services and information on the outside? We want to take your health questions seriously and break down complicated health information so that it is understandable.

We're also here to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Don't get frustrated. Be persistent. In prison, it's often hard to get what you want, but with health information, it doesn't have to be impossible. Join us in our fight for our right to health care and health information.

Read on...

From,
John, Waheedah, Patricia, Brian,
Jaci, & Sam



Catia Fay by Covarrubias, Books Through Bars, Contexts Collection

In this Issue:

Who We Are.....	1
Cellie Rap.....	2
Can You See Me?.....	3
Mental Health Advocates Win A Huge Victory.....	4-5
No One Told Me.....	6-7
PHN Update.....	7
Write An Article!.....	7
Resources for People in Prison.....	8
Subscribe!.....	8

Cellie Rap

by Brian Lafferty, a former inmate

A conversation between two inmates: Frank, an old head who has been through the system more times than he chooses to remember, and Luis, a young man doing his first bid. They are cellmates, talking during count time.

Frank: So, you about up, huh? Feel good, right?

Luis: Man, you don't even know. Get back, see some girls, make some money. Been too long.

Frank: Hear that. You want some coffee? What you doin' when you out?

Luis: What you mean, what I'm doin'? You know what I'm doin', man.

Frank: What's your plan? What you got set for yourself?

Luis: What you talking about?

Frank: You got to plan for this.

Luis: Man, I ain't fittin' to stay up in here planning something. I'm out, dog. I'm out.

Frank: Coffee's ready. You think about that program they was talkin' up?

Luis: That state thing? Man, now I know you crazy. Damn, this coffee's hot. Thanks.

Frank: That state thing gonna keep you outta here. You know the street's gonna bring you back.

Luis: Man, I'm goin' home, meeting some girls, my man Tony gonna get me a spot, make me some money. Be where I know everyone. All I got is four months and a wakeup. I'm golden.

Frank: Them girls is what got you here in the first place. How you expect to go out slinging for Tony and not bring back a hot urine? You know what happens you do that? Be right back here, drinking packets of coffee and doing pushups.

Luis: I got willpower. I ain't coming back.

Frank: Man, willpower and a box of x-lax is the same thing. A load of crap. You go where you know everyone, means everyone knows you. And your business. Do that state program, it's a whole new start. Max out, clean urine, you done.

Luis: Done. After a 30 day blackout. I wanna be out, man. Out. I need some money. Can't make no money there. You know that.

Frank: What you need all this money for? Do this program, walk off your last 6 months of probation, they hook you up with some schooling, a job. Then, only time I see you will be a visit. Right?

Luis: Right. That does sound good.

Frank: Think about it. It's your life.

Luis: Yeah. It's my life.

~BL



can you see me?

by smokie

at times i am impatient
sometimes i don't want to wait
i don't want to wait for some director of a movie
to show you that i am here

when the tv has a show about fellows like me
and you sign and sob and ooh and ahh
i get mixed emotions
i like your tenderness but you don't turn it towards me
i could cry when you tell me after a movie like that
that's how it was yet i was there
can you see me?

when i tell you of some hardship that was there
and you look disapproving
like you don't even care

when i'm downtown trying to be the best i can be
you walk right by me like you can't even see

you say you are moved by the spirit
and you go to church and pray
somehow i think that it's wrong and it shouldn't be that way

i know you pray to god for help
but do you think that you are the only one
who cares, or loves, or even cries
can you really see me?

i have hope for us, yes hope for us all
yet i'm frightened when you can't or won't see me
i know that if you can't see me then you won't see our children

but i am here, look at me
and don't rate me, don't dissect me
don't ignore me
just accept me

why do you try so hard not to see me?

i am here, i am your brother, your husband your friend
i love you
i forgive you

there is no place in the universe for you
except by my side, my dear, my sister, my wife, my friend
can you see me?

Mental Health Advocates Win A

by Greg Mungan

I work as an advocate for the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, (MHASP) located in Philadelphia. In the last month, MHASP received the go-ahead to start the Prison to Community Project, which will provide education and support groups while people are incarcerated in the Philadelphia Prison System, as well as discharge planning and transitional case management when folks are released. I was asked to write an article about this program and our fight to get it in place, with the hope that we can transfer this program to other jails and prisons throughout the country.

Mental Health Care in Prison

My work has included advocating for people hospitalized against their will at a local community hospital. This work gave me the opportunity to meet and talk to many people who came for assistance at the hospital's psychiatric crisis center.

Some of the people I met at the psychiatric crisis center told me that they had just been released from the Philadelphia prisons. People in Philadelphia prisons were denied sufficient health care during the initial screening process, during incarceration and at release.

Folks said they were released from prison without any kind of discharge plan and with either little medication or no medication at all. Often they were merely given a bus token and a referral to a local shelter. Most were released from prison without supports

of any kind. People who desired mental health supports, housing, medical coverage, welfare or social security benefits were left on their own. One of our members, a former inmate, says, "if you don't have mental health problems before you go to jail, you will when you leave."

Fighting for Health Care

MHASP began to advocate for a discharge planning program for mental health consumers coming out of the Philadelphia Prisons. It was around this time that MHASP was asked to join the Philadelphia County Coalition for Prison Health Care (Coalition). The Coalition's membership successfully brought together a diverse mix of people who are formerly incarcerated, people living with HIV/AIDS, mental health consumers, family members, advocates and public interest attorneys. The Coalition was created to specifically address the health care crisis that exists in the Philadelphia Prison System. Or, as Coalition member Brian Lafferty put it so well, the Coalition is fighting for humane health care "from spider bites to HIV."

Through public demonstration at City Hall and public testimony before City Council, the Coalition gave voice to those currently incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. For example, the Coalition has begun to meet with Philadelphia's Prison Commissioner, to push its demands - such as, appropriate discharge planning for ALL inmates, adequate health care for all during imprisonment and community

Huge Victory

oversight of the private corporation, which is responsible for providing all health services at the Philadelphia Prison System. Due in large part to the work of the Coalition, MHPSP has been negotiating over the last two years with City officials to start a program that will work with mental health consumers released from the Philadelphia Prison System.

Advocates Win!

Last month, we finally got the support we need to start the Prison to Community Project (PTCP). The program will provide discharge planning and transitional case management services to approximately 160 mental health consumers each year who have been sentenced in the Philadelphia County prisons. PTCP will also provide mental health education/support groups twice per week at the Philadelphia County prisons. All are welcome at these groups.

PTCP will work with people with mental illness for up to three months prior to their release from prison and for three months after release from prison. We are hoping that offering services during the last stages of incarceration, at release and for three months after release will create uninterrupted support as folks return to their communities.

Prior to release from prison, a benefits specialist working for PTCP will attempt to connect folks to benefits such as Medicaid and Welfare or Social Security cash assistance. Discharge planners will meet with program participants on a regular basis to

create a goal plan. Based on the consumer's desires, the goal plan will address housing, mental health and substance abuse supports, family and social supports, vocational and educational supports and medical care. Transitional case managers will meet with program participants a few times prior to release. Beginning on the date of release and for three months after release, transitional case managers will support folks as they make the transition back to their communities.

One of the goals of the hiring process of PTCP will be to hire some mental health consumers who have been incarcerated. As a person living with mental illness, I know how alienating traditional mental health systems can be. The typical clinical supports set up an "I am healthy and you are sick" type of dynamic. But if we can employ staff that has been there, done that, we can shape the PTCP program to empower mental health consumers.

The Struggle Is Not Over

While PTCP will be located in Philadelphia, we believe it is a model that other cities and communities can take on and make their own.

Honestly, this program is not enough. But it is a start. Even more importantly, it is an example of how, together, we can fight for healthier communities and win.

~GM

Write To:

Greg Mungan
Mental Health Association
of Southeastern Pennsylvania
1211 Chestnut Street, 11th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

No One Told Me

by *Waheedah Shabazz-El, a former inmate*

No one told me that one day I'd be saving the grains of salt that accumulated in the bottom of a pretzel bag to season my food. No one told me. No one told me I'd be using industrial strength floor wax as nail enamel, applied to my breaking nails with cut-pips that I obtained by trading off some other valued necessity. No one told me. No one told me that I'd have crayons soaking in baby oil to use for rouge, lipstick or eye liner.

I was never told that instead of good old Elmer's Glue, I'd be using toothpaste as an adhesive. Applied to the back of my precious family photos, the toothpaste made the pictures stick to the corkboard near my bed provided by the county. I was never told that one day I'd be adapting a pair of county panties into a county "sports bra". Removing the crotch, slipping the crotch over my head, inserting my

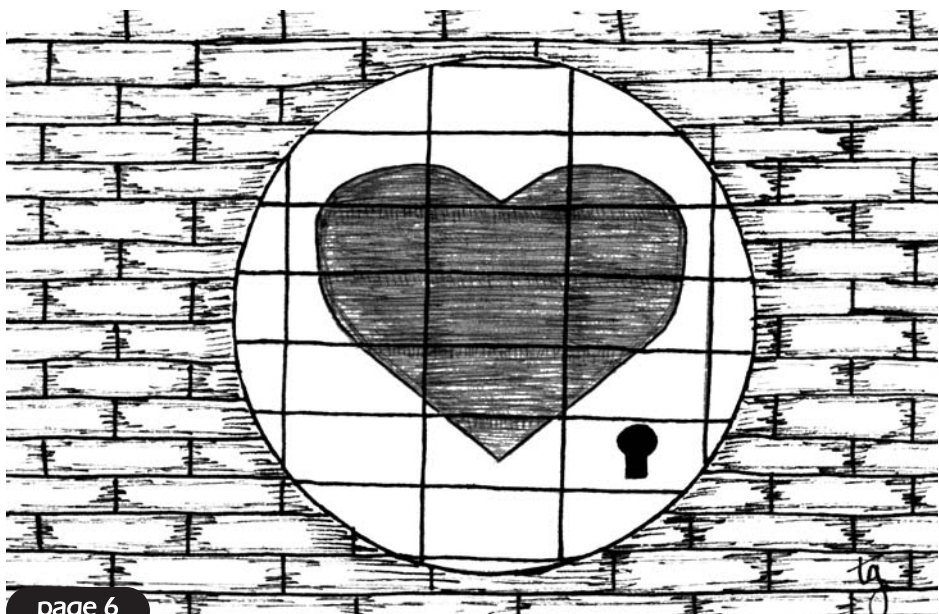
arms through the two orifices designed for my legs. Then I'd pull the inverted waistband down below and under my breast for just the right fit.

I certainly never thought I'd see the day when I'd make a solution of sugar, water, and deodorant to spray on my freshly curled hair; in a feeble attempt to replicate spritz or mousse.

I wasn't given a hint that my Dear Mother would die during my six months incarceration.

Then, when I volunteered to take a free HIV test administered by the prison health system, no one told me that I'd test positive for the virus. No one told me what or what not to do about it. No one told me how or how not to live. In fact, no one told that I could continue to live.

In actuality, I had willed myself to die. But, day after day I kept waking up, ALIVE!



Envelope by Tina Gibson, Books Through Bars, Contexts Collection

There was no literature provided for me, and no one told me to exercise more, increase my water or even to order extra vitamins on my commissary. I wasn't advised to increase my prayer efforts, meditate or keep positive thoughts or hope.

No one told me and in return I told no one. It was my very own dark secret and I dared not tell anyone for fear of being shunned, rejected, stigmatized and left alone.

So one day I was compelled to tell myself that living was more important than dying and that if I must live with HIV, then so be it. No one told me, but today I am prepared to tell you, DON'T PANIC! Life is Good. Grasp it. Claim it. Embrace it. Caress it. Salute it and most of all Assert It.

~WS

PHN Update

We have two exciting updates at *Prison Health News (PHN)*.

First, the staff of the Philadelphia AIDS Library are coordinating all PHN correspondence. They are keeping the subscription list up-to-date, and answering all your letters as quickly as they can.

So please keep writing!

Second, the Philadelphia County Coalition on Prison Health Care (PCCPHC) is now coordinating content and publishing for PHN. They will also be including an insert each issue on exciting news from Philadelphia.

write an article!

We have gotten lots of requests for articles already, and we know that everyone who reads this newsletter will have questions or his or her own story to tell.

If you have advice for other prisoners dealing with health issues, write to us. We will feature you in "Words to Live By."

If you have a question, write to us. We will write you back and may publish an article on your question in *Prison Health News*.

If you want to write an article on something you think is important for prisoners' health, send it and we will consider publishing it in *Prison Health News*. You can also write us first to discuss ideas for articles.

If you want your name kept confidential, you can sign your article with your first name or "anonymous."

In coming issues, we will cover:

- * Nutrition,
 - * Exercise,
 - * Getting Support While You Are Incarcerated,
 - * How to Advocate for Yourself,
 - * HIV Treatments,
 - * Hepatitis C Treatments,
 - * Treatment strategies for HIV and hepatitis C Co-infection,
 - * Depression,
 - * Getting Out,
 - * Staying Clean When You Get Out,
 - * Welfare, Food Stamps, and Medical Assistance,
 - * Housing,
- and much more!*

resources for people in prison

If you need help while you are in, or when you get out, contact:

In Philadelphia, PA

Philadelphia FIGHT
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia PA 19107
(215) 985-4448—no collect calls
Contact: Laura McTighe

In New York City, NY

**Women Prison Association
& Home Inc.**
175 Remsen Street, 9th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 797-0300—for collect calls from
New York Jails/Prisons
(718) 637-6818—no collect calls
Contact: Leah Bundy

In Miami, FL

Care Resource, Miami
225 N.E. 34th Street
Miami, FL 33137
(305) 573-5411—no collect calls
Contact: Pedro Torres

In San Francisco, CA

Continuum Springboard
225 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 823-0414 —no collect calls
(415) 823-0415—no collect calls
Contact: Helen Lin or
Charlie Wilson

In Houston, TX

Houston Montrose Clinic
215 Westheimer
Houston, TX 77006
(713) 830-3000—no collect calls
Contact: Chris Jimmerson

Every organization on this list provides case management, medical care and support services for people when they get out of prison. Most of these organizations specialize in care for people with HIV. Every organization distributes Prison Health News.

If you need resources in a city not listed here, **write to us!**

We will help you tack down answers to your specific questions.

Write to us if you know a great organization that is missing from this list.

If you need information while you are in, contact:

Project Inform

Outreach and Education Department
205 13th Street, Suite 2001
San Francisco, CA 94103-2461
information & newsletters on HIV
*free to prisoners

Fortune News

Subscriptions
c/o The Fortune Society
53 West 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
newsletter on criminal justice issues
*free to prisoners

National HCV Prison Coalition

Hepatitis C Awareness Project
PO Box 41803
Eugene, OR 97404
newsletter & information on hepatitis C
*free to prisoners

Prison Legal News

2400 NW 80th St. #148
Seattle, WA 98117
newsletter on prisoner rights&court rulings
*sample issue \$1. unused stamps OK.

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