

Third Annual NYS Prison Families Retreat and Conference was a Great Success!!

Prison Families of New York, Inc. and Alison Coleman, PFFNY Director, hosted the 3rd annual retreat for adults who have loved ones in NYS prisons from June 23-26 at Wiawaka Holiday House (www.wiawaka.org) on Lake George. The event was partially funded through the generosity of The New York Bar Foundation and The John Dunne Fund.

Forty prison family members engaged in community-building, recreation and a variety of workshops on prison topics including Parole (including a mock parole board interview), Prison Problems and Legal Remedies (which focused primarily on parole violations, revocations, etc) and Choice vs. Chance (a federal Bureau of Prisons Chaplain led a discussion about relationships and prison issues).

Alison facilitated a session which resulted in the following list of policy recommendations which has since been presented in document form to a group of top-level NYS DOCS program staff:

- A new "pro-family" agency policy (with the understanding that confinement is DOCS' #1 concern)
 - Recognition that the NYS prison families community has valuable information and expertise that can assist NYS DOCS and the NYS Division of Parole in lowering the rate of recidivism, easing transition from prison to community and improving the quality of life for prisoners' families and children.
 - Entry adjustment program for families-- orientation for families who volunteer to participate.
 - More literature about prison family resources in visiting rooms, visitor centers.
 - Standards for visitor processing and visiting room procedures.
 - CO training on how to respond to visitors with physical disabilities, assistive devices, etc.
 - At least minimally-equipped children's areas in all prisons.
 - Toys and games in all visiting rooms--reaching out to groups that can donate these and provide supervision for children as well.
 - Children's centers in more prisons (Osborne model).
 - Many more parenting classes.
 - Video and/or e-mail programs that can help children have "something to hold onto" from their incarcerated parents.
 - Organized family/couple activities.
 - Keeping incarcerated members of same family in same hub to make visiting easier.
 - Discharge planning with family involvement.
 - Occasional extended visiting hours, more flexibility.

- Prisoners closer to home—including those from up-state (e.g. prisoner from Buffalo is kept in Wende hub, not Sullivan or Green Haven).
 - Community advisory board to work with DOCS on wide range of family and community issues and to make essential connections with local and state-wide human services and religious networks which can offer services to prison families and those returning from prison.
 - Marriage and family counseling meetings with a knowledgeable therapist every 6 months.
 - Post-release family counseling or meetings.
 - DOCS staff allowed to write letters of reference for those prisoners whom they have supervised/worked with.
 - Furloughs during last year of incarceration- for family reunification.
 - More work release.
 - More family programs at Albion.
 - Concern was expressed at lack of conformity among prisons of various security levels-- this makes for great confusion for visitors. While no one wants conformity to the most restrictive policy, it was suggested that better communication and looking at prisons to some extent from the family/visitor perspective would reveal many inconsistencies and small changes that would make big differences to families.

PFFNY has an agreement with Wiawaka, which generously agrees to open 3 days early so that the retreat can use the entire facility, for an annual event. Anyone interested in 2006, which will focus on leadership development and advanced networking, may contact Alison at 518-453-6659

PFFNY is also providing trainings around NYS for groups of providers who work with children and most likely work with prisoners' children. Although they may not know it, there are as many as 120,000 NYS children who have one or both parents in prison or jail. Training for doctors, medical students, lawyers, social workers, agency staff, county workers, teachers and other educators and all who provide services to children and teens as well as their families MUST include education about prison, its effects on children and families and how to best encourage their success. It is no longer acceptable to say nothing, or "I understand" (if you don't) or otherwise quiet or pacify a prisoner's child who needs much more from the caring adults around him/her. PFFNY can assist you in obtaining the information you need, creating support groups, provide a motivating speaker, etc.

PFFNY support groups now function in Albany, Schenectady, Utica, Rochester, Poughkeepsie, Brooklyn, and Bronx. Contacts also can be found in Buffalo and Syracuse and the New York Inmate Families website (for family members only at www.newyorkinmatefamilies.com) For details or to start a new group, call Alison or The Osborne Assn. hotline for prison families (800-344-3314).

Legislative Happenings

The **Mentally Ill and Solitary Confinement (SHU) Bill**, A.3926 was *passed by the NYS Assembly*. This Bill provides for the creation of psychiatric correctional facilities and transitional service programs for state prisoners with severe mental illness; and provides for assessment of persons incarcerated and subjected to isolated confinement. The corresponding NYS Senate Bill, S.2207 is not yet passed in the Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee.

The **Family Connections (Telephone Justice) Bill**, A.7231, was *passed by the NYS Assembly*. This Bill provides persons incarcerated with telephone services utilizing a debit card system and reasonable collect call system rates. The corresponding NYS Senate Bill, S.5299-A, is not yet passed in the Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee.

Both of the above Assembly Bills were passed thanks to the leadership of Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry.

Resentencing A II drug Offenders. The State Senate and Assembly passed bill number S5880/A8980 which would allow about 500 non-violent drug offenders convicted of A-II level drug felonies to apply to be resentenced to the generally shorter sentences permitted under last year's Drug Law Reform Act. *The Governor has expressed concern about the needed law.*

Excerpts from this Bill follow: Certain offenders convicted of class A-II felony offenses defined in article 220 of the penal law would be eligible to apply to their sentencing courts for a conversion of their indeterminate sentence to a new determinate sentence consistent with section 70.7;1. of the penal law if they are: (a) under sentence to indeterminate terms of imprisonment with a minimum period of not less than three years and a maximum term of life; (b) more than twelve months from being eligible for appearance before the parole board; and (c) otherwise not disqualified pursuant to Correction Law section 803, subdivision 1 paragraphs (i) and (ii) (they have committed some disqualifying violent felony or other enumerated felony offense, although need not have completed the work and treatment or other requirements in paragraph (iii) of that section).

See also <http://www.realreformny.org/>

Call Their Bluff?

A person incarcerated in Auburn C.F. writes that the war on drugs is the **politicians' addiction** that is a super vote getter, enlarges government, creates jobs, and provides lots of pork barreling. He suggests that politicians be told that if they truly care for the people, then they **must** criminalize the most harmful drug, alcohol.

A Possible Correctional Education Amendment to the Federal Higher Education Act ?

Congressman Danny Davis (R Ill) recently proposed an amendment, to allow PELL Grants to those incarcerated persons willing to make some repayment, but it *has NOT passed in the Higher Education Committee.*

1. The Problem. The re-entry of over 600,000 prisoners returning to communities each year is a national concern. The President has asked Congress to aid such re-entry.

A high percentage of persons incarcerated are those in the lowest economic classes, those with the least education, those with least job skills, and those from disadvantaged Afro-American and Hispanic communities. About two-thirds of those released return to prison within three years. Currently, the U. S. spends over \$148 billions each year on crime control.

2. Basics. Rehabilitation of incarcerated persons is in the best interests of society. However, economic self-sufficiency of those released is a pre-requisite to successful re-entry, and to reducing crime and subsequent government expense. Job-skill-oriented Education is often the missing ingredient to economic self sufficiency.

3. A Positive approach. Vocation-oriented post secondary education can often be the vital key to the success of a broader re-entry program (possibly involving alcohol/drug treatment, and good post release supervision). In fact, post-secondary educational programs have a very good record for increasing rehabilitation, and for the consequent reduction of future crime, recidivism, and still more prison time.

4. An Obstacle. Congress forbade, in 1994, the use of PELL grants for any post secondary education for persons who are incarcerated in federal and state prisons. Persons incarcerated already owe a debt to victims and to society for their crimes. Is it not reasonable, therefore, that they may have a special obligation for some form of acknowledgment and repayment to victims and/or to society for any post-secondary educational assistance given them to achieve a productive role in society?

5. Proposed Solution: Amend the current wording to:

"The preceding sentence [prohibiting PELL Grants to incarcerated persons] shall not apply to any individual who has committed, in a program in a State or Federal correctional facility, to substantial repayment of his or her post-secondary education expenses, in the form of work performed or community service. "

See also <http://www.bestweb.net/~cureny/edprtnr.htm>

ACTION ALERT! Dare to Care!

Write to your U.S. Congressman and tell what you think about **re-entry** legislation and **higher education in prisons**. Write to Senator Joseph L. Bruno, Senate Majority Leader, 909 LOB, Albany, NY 12247, and to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, 932 LOB, Albany, NY 12248, and to your district legislators, and tell them how you feel about **restorative justice**, a real **re-entry program for NYS**, unjust **telephone** and **parole practices**, and **mentally ill prisoners in SHUs**..

*Have friends write, too, stating their views (whatever they may be) also on **merit time**, **PELL grants**, **drug laws**, and **the sick and elderly in prison**.*

PLEASE DO IT NOW!

FAMM Sounds the Alarm

Excerpt from FAMM-GRAM, Summer,2005

FAMM (Families Against Mandatory Minimums) has called attention to a raft of federal bills that would transform the way we sentence defendants. The bills would create 50 new offenses, add 80 new mandatory minimum penalties, increase five existing mandatory minimum penalties, and radically alter the federal sentencing guidelines.

The proposed legislation launches the backlash against the Supreme Court's January 2005 *Booker* decision, which made federal sentencing guidelines advisory, not mandatory, giving judges the authority to sentence below the guidelines. These bills threaten to transform the federal guidelines into mandatory minimum statutes in one swift motion and create new and harsher mandatory sentences.

Following the *Booker* decision in January, some members of Congress predicted chaos in the courts and warned that Congress might "fix" sentencing to insure stability. In response, criminal justice experts, the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the U.S. Judicial Conference, former U.S. attorneys, and former Department of Justice officials, judges and others urged Congress to stay its hand.

It was argued that judges should be given the opportunity to use advisory guidelines for a long enough period of time to assess how they are working (about one year). Proponents of the waiting period explained that judges understand the guidelines, are used to applying them and are capable of managing the Supreme Court's decisions in *Booker* to consider the guidelines as one of a number of sentencing factors. This sentiment was underscored at the February oversight hearing on sentencing held in the House.

For further information, see www.FAMM.org

BELIEVE IT!

A person incarcerated in Elmira C.F. writes:

We are always told that we do not have money for schools and medicine. Well, I'm no Einstein and far from being a rocket scientist, but I'm far from being dumber than a box of rocks!

If you truly want change, then we the people must get our voice back, and fine all those who do not do as the people want because we the people sign the checks! ... We the people have been misled to believe falsehoods. When we know it to be a fact, that our employer is lying, why do we act the fool and not fine all of them?

If you truly wish for a change in the laws, you must get all of the leaders of all the different agencies to act as one! **There is power in the people to make the employers behave or hit the road. Believe this as a fact!**

Help Fan the Right Flames!

We're also seeing a lot of positive action in many areas. Never before have there been so many people actively concerned about so many of our issues. From returning college to prisons to real re-entry programs, not to mention drug law reform, telephone justice, parole reform and SHU control. Yes, there are good embers starting to flame. **But you're needed to fan those small flames!** In addition to the Action steps, above, are any of the committee members on page 2 from your district? If so, write them regularly. Remember that they are meant to work for you, particularly if you all join together and speak with one voice.

If you're not already a member, or if your membership has expired (see the expiration date on the addressing label), take a minute now to join (or rejoin) CURE-NY.

Please fill in and mail this membership application to:

CURE-NY, PO Box 102, Katonah, NY 10536
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City State & Zip Code _____
 Phone _____ email _____
 Fax _____

Please check type of membership and Annual Dues

- Prisoner \$ 2.00 Sustaining \$ 50.00
- Basic \$ 10.00 Life \$100.00
- Family \$ 20.00 Benefactor \$500.00

In any case, please send us your email address so you can receive the Newsletter on-line.

Many Thanks

To the steady band of CURE-NY Members who are the financial rock on which this newsletter depends; and especially to the Hudson River Presbytery for their collaboration and financial aid in this and other prison ministry. - *The CURE-NY Editors*

P. R. E. P.

The Prisoners' Reading Encouragement Project, Inc.

is a not-for-profit organization to serve as a support organization to prison libraries and educational programs. Its mission is threefold:

- i) to enhance literacy and educational opportunities for inmates by soliciting and making gifts to prison libraries;
- ii) to educate the public about the need for libraries and educational programming within correctional facilities; and
- iii) to establish scholarship funds for tuition and textbooks for inmates

engaged in courses or independent study while in prison.

Programs. The organization's activities are conducted entirely by volunteers who are motivated by the desire to improve rehabilitation and educational opportunities for incarcerated men and women. PREP solicits donations of appropriate books, audiotapes and videotapes in like-new or very good condition, as well as cash contributions which are used to purchase books such as dictionaries, writing aids, business and trade skills and self-help materials, which tend not to be donated. PREP works in cooperation with the NYS Department of Correctional Services, which provides advice, contacts with prison libraries and transport from our New York City collection area to correctional facilities.

Prison Libraries. Since 2000, PREP donated more than 40,000 books to 23 New York State prisons. Books are transported by volunteers to a central storage area, where they are inventoried; the inventories are offered to the prison librarians who select which books they would like to receive; then the selected books are transported, either by mail or by the State Department of Correctional Services to the correctional facilities. PREP also fills requests from prison librarians, teachers or counselors for educational materials, at no charge to the prisoner and prison facility.

Book contributions came from college libraries, university students, high school students and librarians, major metropolitan museum libraries, bookstore owners, publishers and our neighbors and colleagues. Librarians and facility staff have been enormously appreciative. Librarians report dramatic increases in book circulation as a result of our contributions.

Words Travel. PREP sponsors a program by which inmates can record children's books and send the books and tape to their children. This program makes it possible for incarcerated fathers and grandfathers to maintain a positive relationship with their

CURE-NY

The New York Chapter of National CURE
 Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants
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 Katonah, NY 10536

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children, encouraging the fathers to learn to read aloud to their children and fostering reading in the child who receives a book and a recording of his/her father's voice. In 2004, PREP purchased and provided more than 400 new children's books for this program, benefiting more than 100 inmates and scores of children.

Writing Contests. PREP sponsored a Mother's Day/Father's Day writing contest, providing a new quality dictionary to each of the 80 inmates who took part in the contest by submitting an essay in honor of his mother or father.

Contributions. PREP is a 501(c)(3) corporation, eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions, for which tax receipts are issued to donors. Cash contributions are needed especially for the Words Travel program and for sponsorship of writing contests.

Future Plans. We would like to expand the Words Travel program and writing contest sponsorship to additional facilities. For both of these projects, PREP is primarily dependent on donated funds, which are used to purchase dictionaries and the most popular children's book titles in bulk at reduced costs.

We expect to develop relationships with additional correctional facilities and also enhance educational opportunities for inmates. Many inmates are studying for their GED. Others are studying to take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Examination) or are engaged in self-directed study that could prepare them to earn college credit through the CLEP (College Level Examination Program). PREP can foster this process by providing essential textbooks and related reading materials that are not available at the prisons.

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