

CURE-NY *Newsletter*

To Reduce Crime and Uplift Society

Summer 2007

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New Directions for CURE-NY

At the June 10, 2007 CURE-NY meeting, in Katonah, NY, George and Amy Oliveras were formally installed as the new Co-Presidents and Co-Chairs of the Board for CURE-NY.

Attending that meeting were eight Directors of CURE-NY: Annette Johnson, Tom Penney, Sandra Cuella Oxford, Jim Murphy, Rudy and Betty Cypser, and George and Amy Oliveras. Also present were invited members of our sister organization, CRJ (Citizens for Restorative Justice), and other friends.

George and Amy have been very active in matters of prime importance to CURE-NY. This has included working on revisions to the Merit Time bill and a needed change in work release, changes in drug laws, working with families of incarcerated persons and in-prison inmate organizations to reflect the views of both the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, working with a local radio program to beam justice information to the incarcerated, and working with college students to gather strength from those groups.

As part of this plan, Jim Murphy has agreed to continue to serve as V.P. Treasurer. In addition, Betty and Rudy Cypser have agreed to continue to serve as VP Communications, and co-editors of the CURE-NY Newsletter. George, Amy, Jim, Betty and Rudy will thus serve as the Executive Committee.

This June 10 meeting also debated and then prioritized CURE-NY primary interests. First are four priority areas:

1. Employability
 - Vocational training, Special Education, and Job-oriented post-secondary education
2. Health Services
 - Treatments for drug and alcohol addictions
 - Mental health treatment
3. Rehabilitation Incentives
 - Merit time and work release
 - Fair parole policies and practice
4. Transitional Services
 - Family support policies and practice
 - Mentoring, and the Lifers for Lifers program

We now ask for and welcome your support of these very important and highly promising moves.

Jim Murphy, Rudy Cypser, and Betty Cypser

A 2008 Conference; and a Sept. CURE-NY Annual Meeting

The total reentry process is increasingly recognized as extending before, during, and after incarceration. Rehabilitative programming and preparation for reentry back into the community must begin the first days of incarceration. A comprehensive new look at this entire process is needed.

With a new Spitzer administration in Albany, one that is more open to real reform, it is now a time of great opportunity. We believe that the state can do better and wants to do better, so now is the time for all advocates to help transform our system from punishment to restorative justice, for less crime and less costs.

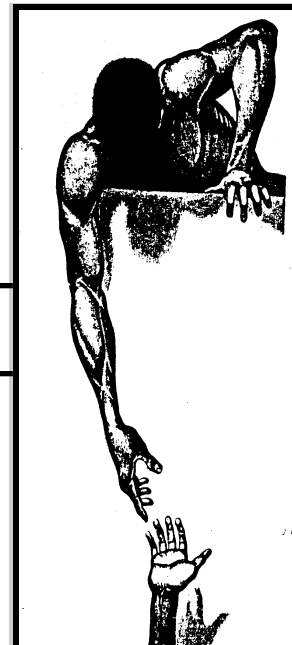
There has, in fact, been much success of more progressive policies in other jurisdictions. One of the more restorative programs is in Canada. Their national prison system has adopted reentry as a philosophy and as the basis for programs within prisons and communities. We can learn much from their experience.

Moreover, the presentations by 35 NYS advocacy groups, at the May 29 *Open Reentry Meeting* (see *State Looks Forward* on page 2), hosted by the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, contain a wealth of knowledge on both what is needed and what works.

There is, however, a great need for educating both the NYS public and legislature on what really works to further rehabilitate, reduce crime, and reduce costs. The June 10 meeting of the CURE NY Board therefore decided to mount a major effort at educating the NYS public and legislature on key reentry programs that work, using the experience in Canada, NYS, and elsewhere.

A key part of that effort will be a Total Reentry Conference held in the Albany area during the NYS legislative session in early 2008. That Spring 2008 conference will add to our educational material and our education strategy and plans, with a tentative focus on the four priority areas previously cited.

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“He Ain’t Heavy”
by Gilbert Young

Spring 2008 Conference; and Sept. CURE-NY Annual Meeting

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The plan for this Spring 2008 conference was further developed in several meetings with the CRJ (Citizens for Restorative Justice) group of families meeting later in New Paltz, NY.

We are not talking of just another conference in Spring 2008. It will be part of a longer range movement to educate NYS public and legislature so as to help the State in improving New York's total reentry policies. Of course any such movement will take a lot of effort and time. It will need an ongoing commitment. We are willing to make that commitment and we are hoping that the select advocate groups being invited, and others, will be willing too.

The CURE-NY Board and CRJ further decided to make workshops, in preparation for that Spring 2008 event, a major part of the CURE-NY Annual meeting scheduled for September 25, 2007.

We decided that a first step would be to contact several other advocacy groups who might be interested to meet with us as part of the September meeting, share our ideas, and together plan the future Spring 2008 Reentry Convocation.

We are therefore now inviting a small number of outstanding advocacy groups who share our concern and are working to change NY's approach to the total reentry process. We are asking them to meet with us and others from around the state, on September 25, to share our ideas, and discuss a common strategy. We are hoping to include DOCS, the Division of Parole, and Probation in these discussions.

We will thus shape the CURE-NY Annual Meeting in Sept. to accommodate 1) a review of the recent moves or plans of Gov. Spitzer's criminal justice team, 2) an introduction to the Canadian philosophy and some elements from the May 29 Open Reentry meeting, and, finally, 3) workshops to incorporate our joint knowledge into concrete plans for the Spring 2008 Reentry Conference.

This CURE-NY Annual meeting, including the planning with invited advocate groups, will take place on September 25, 2007, at the well-known Schuyler Inn, 575 Broadway, Menands, NY, just north of Albany, starting at 9:00 AM. A continental breakfast and lunch will be served, with breakfast starting at 8:30 AM. Those that can afford it are asked for a donation of \$25. As has been our custom, those formerly incarcerated and families are free.

CURE-NY members, advocates, and friends planning to attend should confirm their intention to attend ASAP to cureny@bestweb.net or by phone to Rudy at (914) 232 7959.

STATE LOOKS FORWARD

by George and Amy Oliveras

On May 29th of this year there was an "Open Re-entry Meeting" held in Albany. The host agency of the meeting was the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services. The purpose of the meeting, as stated in the letters of invitation, was to "participate in a meeting on the critical issues facing New York as we formulate an integrated strategy for the successful re-entry of offenders back into the community."

The state agencies were well represented on the thirteen member panel. NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services had three members on the panel: Michael Barrett (Executive Counsel), Sean Byrne (Executive Deputy Commissioner), Beth Ryan (Deputy Commissioner, Office of Strategic Planning).

NYS Department of Corrections also had three members on the panel: Mary Bogan de Belmonte (Assistant Commissioner of Program Services); Brian Fischer (Commissioner); John Nuttall (Deputy Commissioner of Programs). New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Services was represented by the State Director, Robert Maccarone.

NYS Division of Parole had the largest representative body with five panelists: George Alexander (Parole Board Chairman); Patricia Fitzmaurice (Director of Upstate Re-entry); Lynn Goodman (Director of Statewide Re-entry Services); Angela Jimenez (Director of Parole Operations); Felix Rosa (Executive Director).

And lastly, representing the Executive Chamber was the Assistant Deputy Secretary of Public Safety, Lai Sun Yee. Unfortunately, NYS DCJS Commissioner, Denise O'Donnell, was unable to attend due to a family emergency.

The format of the meeting allowed attendees ten minutes to address the panel on the most critical issues affecting the re-entry process. And like the panel, the attendees represented the highest level of private and non-profit organizations and providers in New York State. Thirty-five presenters were scheduled with many others submitting written testimony. The participating agencies included: Osborne Association, Prison Families of NY, Fortune Society, CURE-NY, etc. We have included a complete list of the organizations and the presenters at the end of this piece.

As the presenters spoke, the panelists were taking notes, as were most people in the audience. At the end of each presentation several of the panel members would ask questions that showed they had been listening carefully and had a real interest in what insight could be gained from the highly knowledgeable and experienced people that were there that day.

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STATE LOOKS FORWARD

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The one topic that everyone seemed to agree on without reservation was that of bringing higher education back into the prisons. As now Governor Spitzer said to many of us last year and one presenter repeated at this forum "the lack of college in the prisons is an abomination".

Throughout the day different "dignitaries" would stop in and listen; Senator Montgomery, Assemblyman Aubrey, Michael Balboni (Chair of Homeland Security) and many others. There was definitely a feeling that this collection of experts, whether representing the state agencies or the advocacy organizations and service providers, had gathered to try and begin working together to create solutions to what are agreed upon problems within the prison and during re-entry.

What one realized listening to expert after expert give their suggestions on how the state should proceed with their re-entry efforts, was that we know what works and what doesn't work. The task at hand is for the state agencies and the private and nonprofit providers and advocates to somehow help the public see that diversion programs, education, better mental health services, family and community involvement, viable skills training, drug and alcohol programs, comprehensive discharge planning, and legislated protection from discrimination in housing and employment are some of the best strategies for reducing crime and in so, enhancing public safety. If we can work together and accomplish this we will have the public support needed to fund these efforts.

The atmosphere at this meeting was absolutely one of wanting to work together and move forward with a more balanced approach to Criminal Justice Services. The absence of the adversarial confrontations that defined the Pataki Administration and its relationship with the attending advocacy groups was refreshing and cause for hope that change may have finally arrived in Albany. We were treated as allies instead of enemies.

The complete transcripts are available from NYS DOCJS, but the number of pages makes obtaining a copy expensive; it is eight inches of paper that will soon be made available electronically. Once that happens we will be able to share highlights from the individual presentations.

The following is a list of who presented and in what order.

Eddie Ellis-Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions
Ann Jacobs-Women's Prison Association
Charles LaCourt-Roots Inc.
Alison Coleman-Prison Families of NY
Jonathan Pollack-Incarcerated Veterans Re-entry
Glenn Martin-Legal Action Center
Reverend Terry King-Saving Grace Ministries

Dr. David Deitch-Phoenix House
Mindy Tarlow-Center for Employment Opportunities
Joann Page and Barry Campbell-Fortune Society
Elizabeth Gaynes-Osborne Association
Mary Sprague-Managed Work Services of NY
JoyAnn Savino-Pujals-Citizens for Restorative Justice
Robert Langone-Attorney
Robert Burns-Monroe County Administrator
George and Amy Oliveras-CURE-NY
Dominic Mattina-Daytop Village
Debbie Mukamal-John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Richard Cho-The Center for Supportive Housing
Vivian Nixon-College and Community Fellowship Project, Re-entry Grace

Wanda-Council to the Kings County DA'S Office
Patty Aikens-New Choices Recovery Center
Kenneth Duszynski-Mid Erie Counseling and Treatment
Seep Varma-NYTC-Staying Out Program
Felipe Vargas-The Doe Fund
Kevin O'Connor-Josephs House
Fr. Brett Compton-Bridges of NY
Susan Porter and Jason Hoge- Process commission and Monroe County Legal Assistance
Stephen Chinlund-Episcopal Social Services
Margaret Mayk-Step by Step
Dona LaTour-Elefante-Family Nurturing Center
Alfred Siegel-Center for Court Innovation

Legislative Actions

Gov. Eliot Spitzer and state lawmakers announced that they have agreed on a compromise bill to ban solitary confinement for seriously mentally ill prison inmates because legislation passed this session faced a certain veto by the executive.

The Senate passed the bill unanimously during a special session and the Assembly is scheduled to vote on the measure when it returns to Albany later this year. The legislation would require the State Dept. of Correctional Services to set up residential treatment units for inmates with serious mental illnesses. Prisoners would be offered at least four hours a day, five days a week, of therapeutic programming and/or treatment out of their cell.

Senate Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee Chairman Michael Nozzolio, R-Fayette, Seneca County, said the bill is a "landmark legislative measure, fully agreed upon with the Assembly and the governor."

PFNY Annual Retreat

By Amy Oliveras

The fifth annual retreat, created by Prison Families of NY (Alison Coleman, to be more specific) was held June 20-24 at Lake George, NY.

When Alison first came up with the brainstorm that is the PFNY retreat, it was for the purpose of community building, and much needed rest and relaxation for the women who have loved ones incarcerated. It still serves those purposes, but it has become much more. For one thing, it is now for women who have loved ones incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.

This year, the retreat included very productive workshops by Coalition for Parole Restoration, CURE-NY and NY Families of Lifers and Long Termers.

We had a beautiful memorial service for the husband of one of the PFNY family that had died in prison earlier in the month. It was a very moving ceremony in which everyone shared a loss they had experienced at some time in life. It was wonderful to see the support offered to someone that was living our worst nightmare of having our loved one never making it home.

The Friday of the retreat was a day that gave all of us a new sense of hope in this situation we all share. On that day we were joined by John Nuttall from DOCS and Felix Rosa, Patricia Fitzmaurice and Ed Fraley from parole. This was historical in the sense that our gathering, a group of family members with loved ones in prison or on parole, were being recognized as worthy of spending the day with by the current administration. That means that we are being recognized as having a voice that needs to be listened to. Not only are these civil servants being allowed to meet with us, they are being encouraged to do so. It surely is a sign of the changing times. (I must note here that each of the four employees of DOCS and parole that were present have individually made themselves available to us in the past, now it is with blessings from their boss.)

In addition to a prediction by John Nuttall that “somehow, some way, college will be back in prison”, we learned about an increased focus on the needs of those serving long sentences and the challenge for those serving life without parole. It was encouraging to learn that there is a more balanced approach to corrections by this administration than the previous one. In this vein, new corrections counselors are being given a weeks training on the family issues involved with the incarcerated they deal with while trying to redesign their role to one more

CURE-NY

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focused on counseling and less focused on paper pushing. He told us that the parenting program is being expanded and will eventually be available statewide. We could sense the frustration by Mr. Nuttall on not being able to properly prepare everyone for release due to insufficient staffing and funds to provide enough programs to be completed before release.

The message of a more balanced approach to rehabilitation, corrections and parole carried through with the information sharing that took place with the parole staff also. It was emphasized by Executive Director Felix Rosa, that being a parole officer is not about carrying a gun, but about trying to help those that are on parole successfully complete their time of supervision. There is a renewed emphasis on hiring parole officers with social work background and not strictly law enforcement history.

On the final morning of the retreat we heard from two formerly incarcerated men about the difficulties and rewards of getting out of prison after serving twenty-five and twenty-seven years inside. It was encouraging to see ones that have made it out and are making it work on the outside.

It was a very successful retreat with more information than can possibly be shared here. I have left out so much. What we need to do now is to help find funds to ensure this fine tradition continues. Alison Coleman has worked miracles as part of her vision of what is possible for prison families, and I want to take this opportunity to thank her publicly for helping change the quality of life of those that are trying to maintain while their loved ones are serving time.

