We dedicate this issue of *The Fire Inside* to Debbie Peagler, mother and grandmother, domestic violence survivor, advocate, educator, singer, cancer survivor and dear Sister. Debbie was released from Central California Women’s Facility in August, 2009 after 26 years of incarceration. She is rebuilding her life and is active raising awareness of domestic violence issues through her film *Crime After Crime* and community outreach. We send Debbie total love and support and wish her all the best in this next chapter of her amazing life!

As of January, 2010 many educational and vocational jobs were cut at Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF). Some classes will remain, but not any GED or ESL.

All our college classes are correspondence courses. We do have a person who hands out materials, allows us to watch educational videos, collects our homework, quizzes and final papers and sends them to the college. She was fired. It feels like one of the few paths to improve ourselves is being taken away. Just as they are starving our minds with cuts in education, they are also starving our bodies of nutrition.

I have been in Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) since 1996, when I was 22. I acquired considerable employable skills. I have been able to give back to the community and change my lifestyle.

Often women have not had the opportunity to gain an education. With the educational and vocational programs we can be successful. Statistics show that female offenders have a low recidivism rate and are non-violent; but taking these programs from us will give us no avenues to work on ourselves.

Many of us came to prison scared and without much hope. But we have the freedom to choose our future and the ability to change. Education and vocational programs work well because women can focus on themselves and prepare to be better citizens in the community.

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I have been incarcerated for almost eleven years. When I first arrived I did not speak English. I was proud of my heritage and my roots. Thanks to the educational programs that were available I learned how to speak English, completed the GED, Vocational Eye Wear course and I also am involved in many self-help groups.

Through the classes, encouragement, and through our facilitators, we get a chance to work on ourselves. We discover new strengths. If the education and vocational programs in VSPW and other prisons are cancelled, how many mothers, daughters, sisters, aunties and grandmothers will lose opportunities to learn and achieve some of their goals?

This not only affects female offenders, but the families and the communities to which we are returning.

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—Wind Click

—Guadalupe Valle

continued on p. 8
Article 5 of the California Constitution clearly affirms the duty of the State to provide free, publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools. In 1992, the State Supreme Court wrote that California “has assumed specific responsibility for a statewide public education system open on equal terms to all,” and must ensure education equality.

California statutes mandate education for people in state prisons. The CDCR Secretary must appoint a Superintendent of Education to administer prison education programs and must create and implement a system of incentives to increase participation in and completion of academic and vocational programs. The 1989 Prisoner Literacy Act states the intent of Legislature to increase the percentage of prisoners who are literate because illiteracy is correlated with recidivism. This law mandates literacy programs designed to insure that prisoners achieve a 9th grade reading level by the time they parole. The California Penal Code also defines funding prison education at a specified rate per student per year.

Title 15, Article 3, section 3040 also affirms that CDCR will offer an education program when it states that prisoners may be assigned to “work, education, or other programs, or to a combination.”

The California Education Code acknowledges the State’s responsibility to provide “equal rights and opportunities in the educational facilities of the state.” Both federal and state courts have ruled that individuals do not lose their right to equal protection when incarcerated. In 1970, 1972 and 1979 California Supreme and Appellate Courts ruled that budget concerns may not be used to exclude women from equal protection of the laws or restrict fundamental rights. Courts in other states have also ruled that disparate educational or vocational programs for prisoners based solely on gender violate equal protection.

The 2007 Youth Bill of Rights guarantees people in juvenile facilities an equal education. This law also insures that young people will continue to receive educational services and vocational training even while on disciplinary or medical status. These services must be: comparable to education outside of prison, age appropriate, and must include GED and high school graduation plans.

CDCR has a legal duty to provide educational and/or vocational classes and cannot use budget cuts as an excuse to deny education to prisoners. It’s the law!

Note: If you would like the case law citations used for this article, please write us.

Barbwire Rose
Chi Chi Locci, vocalist, CCWF

For many years now at CCWF I have been fortunate to be a part of Arts-in-Corrections, a program that has nurtured some of the most amazingly talented women in the state of California. It offers drawing, pottery, guitar, sculpturing, music and painting. While often recognized for their community bowl fundraisers, the program offers much more! As part of the rehabilitation process, we have created a venue to continue our dreams and passions. Veteran musicians including guitarist Rickie Soria, Destiny Mardisch on flute, vocalists Chi Chi Locci and Gia McClain have come together with new members, bassist Sara Dutra, keyboardist Toni Song and Heaven Watson on drums. We cover different genres of music from Rhythm-n-Blues to the latest Alternative and Hip Hop. Something I haven’t heard since the Escorts in San Quentin many years ago...

Planning our summer concert series, our band would appreciate any invitations or requests. We also want to thank the Warden and Staff for allowing us such an opportunity—although we are enclosed with barbwire, we are still aspiring ROSES.

The Fire Inside
On March 31, 2010, the US Supreme Court upheld the rights of immigrants in the criminal justice system in the *Padilla v. Kentucky* decision. This decision centered on the case of Mr. Jose Padilla, a U.S. Vietnam War veteran, green card holder and long-time U.S. resident who faced deportation after pleading guilty to a drug charge.

Angie Junck, an attorney at the San Francisco Immigrant Legal Resource Center (and member of CCWP’s Advisory Board) said, “The *Padilla* decision sends a clear message that in a state like California, immigration issues cannot be ignored in the representation of noncitizen defendants. Even though the law in California already dictates that lawyers accurately advise their clients on the immigration consequences of criminal pleas, this decision further ensures that defense counsel consider the potentially dire consequences of a criminal case on a noncitizen.”

The Supreme Court’s decision in this case acknowledges that as a result of the 1996 immigration laws, even low-level offenses—such as one-time shoplifting or marijuana possession—can lead to deportation for immigrants, including green card holders. In many of these cases, immigration judges are not even allowed to consider immigrants’ length of time in the country, U.S. citizen spouses and children, or other equities.

For more information contact: Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 1663 Mission Street, Suite 602, San Francisco, CA 94103. Phone: (415) 255-9499  Fax: (415) 255-9792.  www.ilrc.org

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**Decisión de la Corte Suprema Defiende los Derechos de Inmigrantes**

Pam Fadem, traducido por Terra Mickelson

En marzo 31, 2010, la Corte Suprema de los EEUU defendió los derechos de inmigrantes en el sistema de justicia criminal en la decisión *Padilla v. Kentucky*. Esta decisión se giró alrededor del caso del Sr. Jose Padilla, un veterano de la Guerra Vietnam, poseedor de permiso de residencia y antiguo residente de los EEUU quien era enfrentado con deportación después de declarar culpable para una carga de drogas.

Angie Junck, una abogada en el Centro de Recursos Legales para Inmigrantes de San Francisco (y miembro del Comité Consultivo de CCWP) dijo, “La decisión *Padilla* manda un mensaje claro que en un estado como California, rasgos de inmigración no pueden ser ignorados en la representación de defendientes no ciudadanos. Aunque la ley en California ya dicta que abogados aconsejen exactamente sus clientes en las consecuencias de la inmigración de súplicas criminales, esta decisión asegura más que abogados defensores consideran las consecuencias de un caso criminal para alguien no ciudadano.”

La decisión de la Corte Suprema en este caso reconoce que a causa de las leyes de inmigración de 1969, hasta ofensas bajas—como hurto en tiendas una vez o posesión de marihuana—pueden resultar en deportación para inmigrantes, incluyendo poseedores de permisos de residencia. En muchos casos, jueces de inmigración no son permitidos considerar cuanto tiempo inmigrantes han estado en el país, parejas o hijos quien son ciudadanos de los EEUU, u otros valores.

Para más información contacta: Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 1663 Mission Street, Suite 602, San Francisco, CA 94103. Phone: (415) 255-9499  Fax: (415) 255-9792.  www.ilrc.org
El gobierno estatal de California, en el nombre de “balanceando el presupuesto,” está eliminando prácticamente todos los medios por los cuales la gente en la prisión puede salir y permanecer afuera y libre. En enero 2010, la dirección de estado hecho por Gob. Schwarzenegger anunció un “cambio de prioridades” en California por medio de proponiendo una enmienda constitucional que “garantizaría” un cambio de puesto en la financiación de las prisiones a la educación.

Sin embargo, la propuesta del Gob. financiaría la educación al expenso de prisioneros, privatizando prisiones y recortando más programas de rehabilitación en las prisiones, incluyendo los del salud y la educación! En vez de reduciendo el presupuesto de las prisiones por medio de recortar el desarrollo de bienes inmuebles de las prisiones o por medio de liberar los miles de prisioneros quienes deben estar en casa, el Gob. y el CDCR están eliminando todos los programas restantes que ayudan a preparar a gente para apoyar a ellos mismos y sus familias ya cuando son puestas en libertad, incluyendo los que dan prisioneros con condena-a-vida la oportunidad para conseguir una fecha en sus audiencias de tablero de libertad condicional.

Estemos claros—el estado de California está desmantelando la educación pública en total, ad-}

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**El 22 Marzo en Sacramento**

gente de color y toda la gente de suelto bajo en prisión.

Los programas de capacitación de habilidades básicas de trabajo y autoayuda, tales como los cursos de GED y ESL, manejo del temperamento, cursos para la educación de padres, y programas para la drogadicción, se están cortando o eliminando. Hasta programas dirigidos por voluntarios, cuales requieren que personal esté presente, se están cortando a la vez que se reduce la personal de la prisión. Se han dicho recientemente al grupo de condenas largas en CCWF que ya no tienen un miembro de personal para supervisar el programa. Recursos como libros, armarios, salas de reunión, y posiciones del entrenamiento se están cortando también. El gobierno federal también se retiene recursos para la educación pública cuando se excluye a gente con convicciones de delito mayor por drogas—hasta después de que son puestos a libertad y regresados a la comunidad—de recibiendo becas Pell de educación.

Han habido siempre, y siempre serán, educadores de par adentro de la prisión—personas que se enseñan uno a otro inglés, como leer y escribir, intercambian información sobre la SIDA y HepC, y discuten como ser padres y personas mejores. Este tipo de educación ocurre porque el gente adentro tiene la dedicación y la corazón para enseñar y apoyar uno a otro, sin paga ni reconocimiento. Ningunos recortes presupuestarios pueden parar esta energía humana para enseñar y aprender. Sin embargo, la educación del par no cumple los requisitos de programas de CDCR que son necesarios para libertad condicional, y no es suficiente para capacitar a gente para trabajar.

Educación es un derecho humano. El estado de California ha decidido que una porción grande de nuestra población se merece nada más que siendo puesta en una celda y lanzando lejos la llave. CCWP se junta con diez de miles de estudiantes, educadores y activistas de comunidad en los dos lados de las paredes de las prisiones quien se oponen las cortas en la educación adentro y afuera de las prisiones. Decimos, “¡FUNDA LA EDUCACION, NO LA ENCARCELACION!”
California State government, in the name of “balancing the budget,” is eliminating virtually all means by which people in prison can get out and stay out. In January 2010, Gov. Schwarzenegger’s state address announced a “change in priorities” in California by proposing a constitutional amendment that would “guarantee” a shift in funding from prisons to education.

The Governor’s proposal would fund education on the backs of prisoners by privatizing prisons and further cutting prison rehabilitation programs, including health and education! Instead of reducing the prison budget by cutting prison development or by releasing the thousands of prisoners who should be going home, the Gov. and CDCR are eliminating all prison programs that help prepare people to support themselves and their families once they are released. This includes programs that give term-to-life prisoners a chance to get a date at their parole board hearings.

Let’s be clear—the State is dismantling public education overall, inside and outside of prison. And similar to conditions in communities outside, there is a disproportionate impact on people of color and all low income people in prison.

Basic job skills training and self-help programs such as GED and ESL classes, anger management, parenting classes, and substance abuse programs are being cut or eliminated. Even volunteer-run programs, which all require staff to be present, are being cut as prison staffing is reduced. The Long-termers group at CCWF was told they no longer have a staff member to oversee the program. Resources such as books, lockers, meeting rooms and training positions are also being slashed. The federal government also withholds education resources when they exclude people with felony drug convictions—even after they are released into the community—from receiving Pell education grants.

There always have been, and always will be, peer educators inside prison—people who teach each other English, how to read and write, exchange information about HIV and HEP C, and discuss how to be better parents and better people. This kind of education occurs because of the commitment and heart of the people inside to teach and support each other, with no pay or recognition to show for it. No budget cuts can stop this human energy for teaching and learning. However, peer education doesn’t meet the CDCR requirements for programming that is necessary for parole, and it isn’t sufficient to train people for jobs and employment.

Education is a human right. Apparently the state of California has decided that a large part of our population deserves nothing more than being put in a cell and throwing away the key. CCWP joins with tens of thousands of students, educators and community activists on both sides of the prison walls who oppose the cuts to education inside and outside of prisons. We say, “FUND EDUCATION, NOT INCARCERATION!”
The Fire Inside interviewed Melody about the beautiful friendship and peer mentor she had with Darlene while incarcerated at CIW. Melody’s mentor helped her learn job skills, but more importantly helped Melody to heal and grow as a human being.

**FI:** Darlene was a peer counselor to you. What did that relationship look like?

**Melody:** You can sit across from a professional and open your heart and spill out your soul and the closest you’re going to get to any kind of compassion or sympathy is an occasional “and how did that make you feel.” Talking to Darlene was talking to someone who had been abused, knew first hand what it was like to be lost, trapped, to feel alone with no help in sight. She didn’t have to ask how something made me feel, she already knew. To hear that there was hope from someone that had been through the same hell made all the difference to me.

It helps me stay clean remembering that Darlene took time from her life to teach me things my own family and friends wouldn’t. She shared her heart and soul with me and the unconditional friendship she gave me is something I will cherish forever. The only way I do even half for her of what she has done for me, is to be out here fighting for her release.

**FI:** What kind of job and life skills did you learn from Darlene?

**Melody:** Computers and running. I knew absolutely nothing of either one and by the time I left I knew enough computer stuff to start my business and help others, and I can do a 5k or 10k run. I have always felt that emotionally and health-wise you have to be straight, you need that to be strong. I also learned coping skills, such as writing down things that I was holding inside. Those that had hurt me and the anger I couldn’t let go of, I learned to express what I felt and how they had hurt me. I would write and lash out on paper, rather than through actions like I had in the past. I was able to release that emotion in a positive way.

Darlene helped me get a good job at CIW in a department that required excellent computer skills, and I didn’t even know how to turn one on at that time. Darlene taught me everything she could to help me advance. I learned to create Power Point presentations that were shown to all staff at CIW. I learned how to create a monthly magazine that went to every employee at CIW, as well as a copy to every institution in California. Today I use the skills Darlene taught me to make brochures, fliers, notifications and postcards for my own business.

**FI:** How have you used the knowledge you learned from Darlene to help others?

**Melody:** There’s always someone better off than someone else and there are others less fortunate as well. Envy, jealousy, and being judgmental are three things that will always hold you back. I learned from Darlene how to learn from those who may be better off, and then take that and teach those less fortunate than me. I share with my daughter that everyone makes mistakes. Some people make bigger mistakes then others, but that doesn’t make them less of a human being. Everyone has a heart and soul; they have feelings that can be hurt. It’s what you do after the mistake that makes the difference in how you change or how you better yourself.

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**Goodbye Shawna Sanchagrin**

In March 2010 CCWP said goodbye to our dear friend and CCWP Program Coordinator Shawna Sanchagrin after many years of her dedication and hard work. With her own experience of growing up with a parent in prison, Shawna first came to CCWP as a student intern, stayed on as a volunteer and then became staff. Shawna was always there to assist someone just being released from prison, and helped CCWP to better understand and respect the importance of gender identity in prison. We wish her well in the next steps in her life and look forward to her return!
In March 2010, Deirdre Wilson took over as the new coordinator of programs at CCWP. We introduce her to all who may not have met Deirdre in person. Welcome Deirdre!

Q: How did you come to do prison support work?

In 2002, I went to prison for 3 years, 7 months. In many ways, I grew up there, went through a process of rediscovering myself. I also discovered the beauty, strength and heart of the women and transgender people behind the walls. It gave me great compassion as well as awareness of the vast ignorance in our society about people convicted of crimes—who they are, their circumstances, and what they need when they get home, if they are allowed to come home.

I was heartbroken by the reality of lifers at CIW, who had already served decades of life sentences. I could have been one of them so easily. It enraged me that so many really special people who have so much to give were being shut away from their families and the rest of society. Most of these women have experienced abuse in the course of their lifetimes, whether it was related to their crime or not. I carry these women with me always, which is really what has brought me to this work. The situation is intolerable on general principle, but it is also a very personal thing for me to get my sisters out of there.

I started volunteering with Free Battered Women (FBW) in 2006, about 6 months after I was released. Andrea Bible in particular, and the whole FBW/CCWP community made me feel honored for surviving my experiences and accepted me just as I was—a rare feeling for people released from prison! FBW was doing work to support close friends of mine who were still in prison. It has been a great gift to work on campaigns that have brought some of them home.

Q: What draws you to CCWP?

The issues and concerns of people in women’s prisons and their families, and the impact of the Prison Industrial Complex on this country—particularly on communities of color—is deep in my blood. When you have been there yourself, see things for what they are, and know that you have tools, skills, experiences and the heart to fight for change, it is a responsibility and a great gift.

The system of mass incarceration is nothing short of genocide on communities of color. The increase in the number of women being locked up is especially devastating. Had I lived in the time of slavery, I would like to believe that I would have used my heart and soul to fight it. What will our response be now?

I see CCWP as a home base because it embodies the values that challenge oppression of women and people of all gender identities that don’t ‘fit’ into a patriarchal model. The collective structure, and the way we conduct ourselves in CCWP, empowers each person to feel safe to be who they are. The fact that we are supported and directed by membership both inside and outside prison is awesome!

Q: Do you have some specific hopes or plans for CCWP?

I have a long term vision to continue to enlighten a broad base of our society about who people in prison are as human beings so that we will no longer be able to tolerate the prison system as a solution. I hope to demonstrate how folks motivated by their hearts can support and empower people so it becomes irresistible, and spreads to all areas of life breaking down the PIC through the force of love.

To stop the genocide and to save the soul of this nation, we need to pay more attention to healing than to recrimination, punishment and judgment. Generations of families are being wounded and it is the children who are blameless but pay the highest price. I want us to significantly change the system of mass incarceration, and for CCWP to be a model for how that can happen.

I look forward to deepening the level of communication we can have with the members inside and to really engage people in development of their leadership capacity. Our primary strength is listening. We first listen to the voices of our membership inside—those who have the greatest knowledge of what is needed. Each person has wisdom, whether they have been in the organization a long or short time. I have a vision of CCWP as a large extended family. So many of us need to build an understanding of, and comfort with, a functional and healthy family. For me, building according to values of a healthy family is the seed of a true social justice movement.
I graduated from small engine repair / motorcycles, a vocational course that has been cut due to budget issues. The education department is supposed to be a form of rehabilitation, a set of tools to use upon our release so that we are able to function in society. With the cuts, many of us will not have the opportunity to take vocational classes or receive a high school diploma or GED.

The accomplishment of obtaining my certification was so empowering. I write this in hopes of my voice being heard, my story somehow being felt, and possibly encouraging those responsible to change things so more people can use incarceration as rehabilitation.

I have been incarcerated since 1998. My most beneficial and rewarding job assignments have been in vocation and education. I completed Vocational Landscaping and Small Engines, and then requested to be placed in the Calm Class. I was assigned to Calm II, with Mr. Carabajal as the instructor. Through the journaling taught in Calm classes, I gained not only personal insight, but also became more aware of the responsibility I had in regards to my life and my offense. Now as the clerk, I continue to listen repeatedly to the curriculum and get something new out of it every time.

I would not have gotten near as far as I have in my recovery and rehabilitation had it not been for my time in the vocation and Calm classes. I have gained not only knowledge, but also a great deal of pride each time I learned skills which will help me be a positive citizen in the community.

It is my firm belief that if you cancel many of our programs, giving women more idle time, then the violence will increase and intensify here.

I’ve been in prison for 14 years serving a sentence of Life Without Parole for a crime that my adult co-defendant committed when I was 16 years old. I completed all of the self-help groups offered and I am currently in the White Bison program. I received my GED and I’m presently aiming for my AA in Behavioral and Social Science with a Certificate of Achievement in Business. I am on the Gang Intervention Panel working with a District Attorney and a Juvenile Judge from San Joaquin Valley, striving to make a difference in preventing youth from going to prison. I’m not the only individual who has exhibited this type of personal growth and been able to reach maturity in spite of overwhelming circumstances.

Kids cannot get the Death Penalty, but LWOP is indeed a death sentence. It allows no chance for us to prove that change has occurred.

Even though I came to prison a young, scared and immature child, I have transformed into a responsible, caring, nurturing and helpful youth mentor. If you have not already considered SB399 I ask you to please support this bill. It motivates rehabilitation, education, restores self-esteem and self worth, which is what a system that promotes Rehabilitation should really be about.

I was hired as a peer health educator at CCWF. I am honored to be a part of this extraordinary program. The peer education program is run by an outside organization called Centerforce and provides incarcerated women with a unique sense of freedom through knowledge. As peer health educators, we reach out to and speak to our peers about a wide variety of health related topics, risky behaviors, prevention methods, and serve as sounding boards. This program isn’t just about HIV prevention and safe sex, it’s so much more. It lays down a foundation strong enough to foster growth, unity, and positive change for anyone. I encourage everyone to visit the peer office, or seek out
the peer volunteers in your housing units.

—Terah Lawyer

The college program at VSPW is amazing. The opportunity to earn a GED, high school diploma or college diploma is planting a seed for future success. Many women enter the system broken and/or with addictions. We need programs and forums to create the tools to change in life.

I sincerely hope you carefully consider gender equity when calculating future changes. It not only affects us, but those to whom we are returning.

—Lynn M. Noyes

Frankly, I do not see how the state can afford not to educate its prisoners. The prison is full of men and women who lack skills training. We are a part of our community.

I have been fortunate to be a participant in two vocational training programs. My instructors were patient and worked tirelessly to help us become better people. I am thankful for my training and I hope in the future that our state will see the value of education and vocational programs within the prison system.

—Charlotte A. Key

Closing down education is a big loss, especially for those seeking a GED or needing ESL. It will make it worse for those of us who are uneducated or who don’t speak English.

Without educational opportunities some will get further in trouble. There is a lot of time to do nothing.

It will be even harder to get a job here, with all the cuts. And it will certainly be a lot harder to get a job out there, where unemployment is already so high.

Women participating in college courses are also affected. College courses help us explore opportunities we did not know about. They help us know how the world is changing.

We fought for those courses! It was prisoners who found colleges that were willing to offer correspondence courses and even come up with some scholarship money for tuition and books. How can the prison take away things they have not provided for us?

Without education, what is “correction” and what is “rehabilitation” in CDCR? What happens to our learning abilities when education is cut? How do we connect with society? How can we reach any of our dreams? Or develop ambitions?

—V. Cardinal

Cutting education budgets all over the country, but especially here in California, is wrong. It hurts our children and it hurts the whole society.

The cuts in prison education are also wrong. How can you expect to get a job when you get out without an education? If you leave prison with tools to make it in society, you will have a chance at a successful life. Without them you are more likely to come back to prison.

—V. Juarez

I took the GED test 2 days ago. It was facilitated by the Alternatives to Violence Project. I want to keep doing what I have to do in here to meet my date in 2010. I want to have something under my belt when I come out.

Education and many self-help groups are very needed here. I am trying to get the GED because I have kids I want to take care of when I get out. I dropped out in 9th grade. I only had 5 high school credits then. Now I have 180 credits.

In the free world I want to work with kids either in a day-care or a hospital. I do that now, taking care of kids who come to visit. I make flash cards for them to play with, etc.

Learning is important throughout life. I want to keep learning. I owe it to myself to learn. I want to learn from my kids, too. For them, I don’t want to sell myself short anymore.

A lot of women come in young and discouraged. They just live for today. You have to have some hope. If you have a life sentence, what are you going to do with yourself? I used to be angry all the time, to fight in response to most situations. I had to learn other ways of thinking—about myself and about others.

Teachers were the heartbeat of our future. Now they’re hitting the beat, looking for employment elsewhere.

Recidivism? Women are nurturers. Most of the time they are the only parent. With skills they would not have to continue a welfare lifestyle. They could raise their children.
In addition to the separation people in prison experience due to physical barriers, such as the distance between prisons and communities, walls, and cells, borders develop within prisons themselves. In the case of compañeras in VSPW, language—specifically the lack of the English language—constructs additional borders for many. Too often compañeras speak of the lack of translators in legal, medical, or disciplinary situations which result in aggravating the already violent situation they find themselves in.

As a response to this situation, compañeras resorted to teaching each other English and Spanish. In one case, a compañera discussed how she grew up being embarrassed of being Mexican, so she refused to speak Spanish. While in prison she witnessed injustices against mono-lingual Spanish speakers. She made a concerted effort to learn the language to be able to communicate with and support Spanish speakers. In most cases, it is Spanish speakers that have to learn English to navigate their situation in prison.

English as a second language was part of the curriculum available for women in prison. Due to the economic recession these classes are being terminated. Thus Spanish-speaking women are resorting to imprisoned bilingual speakers to teach them the necessary communication skills to survive in prison.
I was a resident of the Honor Dorm, Unit 512, C Yard at CCWF for 3 years. The criteria for living in this unit are: you must be disciplinary free, have a job or be programming. The privileges you get in the Honor Dorm—first in line for chow release, R&R packages, family visiting, release from lock downs, and first to receive food sales—are nice to have, and I am wholly in favor of positive reinforcement and rewards for good behavior. I want to offer some suggestions about how to make the Honor Dorm work for everyone.

First off, with all the cuts in education and programming, will the Honor Dorm be the only dorm programming and receiving education which is a right, not a privilege or reward? As far as disciplinary free inmates—haven’t we all heard of bogus write ups? A write up for expired meds that you forgot you even had stashed in the back of your locker? There are only 200 inmates in the Honor Dorm out of almost 4000 prisoners at CCWF. Surely the Honor Dorm prisoners are not the only “good prisoners”?

The other problem I see with the Honor Dorm is that it sets up judgment on both sides. It sets up a mentality of, “I am better than you because I live in the Honor Dorm and I have a job,” by those living there and, “You think you’re special and better than me because you live in the Honor Dorm,” by those not. Oftentimes, the officers will judge prisoners this same way. They lay guilt trips on prisoners in the Honor Dorm if they make a mistake or act out. They say, “Oh that’s not very honorable,” in a sneering way or threaten a prisoner with getting kicked out of the Honor Dorm if they make a mistake.

Everyone in prison is under incredible stress, and fights are one of the primary responses to that pressure. Even if you are not fighting, are following all the rules and doing your time in a peaceful and productive way trying to get home to your family, you can be slammed into your cell because of “security issues.” The fight may not even be in your dorm! Those fights, or even something as minor as a missing tool from the “sewing factory,” can interrupt family visiting, programming, and even church services.

To be treated better because you earned it is a good feeling to have. I believe it is our collective responsibility to take care of each other and to include each other so everyone can feel valued. So how about making mentoring people outside of the Honor Dorm a requirement to live in the Honor Dorm? This way, we can help reinforce that rehabilitation and education are rights, not privileges, and Honor Dorm prisoners should not be the only ones programming and getting educational rights. Jobs and programming can mean the difference between being deemed eligible for parole and not. This is serious!

Again, it is our collective responsibility to take care of each other and contribute to the healing of those who are wounded and struggling. People inside can help create this community of mutual support by breaking down the judgments, divisions and competition. We can inspire those who are willing and able, to take it with them back to their communities.

Deborah Peagler, a victim of domestic violence who was released from prison after over 26 years—thanks to the volunteer efforts of Bay Area attorneys—visited San Francisco on February 4 to attend a screening of a documentary film about her life.

On hand was Filmmaker Yoav Potash, Deborah’s attorneys, her daughter Natasha, former prisoners, and many supporters and friends.

The film, Crime After Crime, brought viewers into the largest women’s prison in the US and retold the gripping events of Peagler’s saga. The film is expected to be released next year. It has earned the support of The Sundance Institute, The San Francisco Foundation, The Bay Area Video Coalition, and The Foundation for Jewish Culture’s Lynn and Jules Kroll Fund for Jewish Documentary Film. The event was hosted by The Queen’s Bench, a Bay Area women’s bar association.
March 4th day of action: demonstrations against education cuts!

On March 4, 2010, tens of thousands of students, parents, teachers, workers, and community folks walked out, rallied, picketed, marched and even lay down on an Oakland freeway to defend public education in California. In the face of devastating cuts to education, including education programming within the prisons, and the threat of more cuts to come, we demanded fully funded, free public education from preschool through graduate school plus adult education. We chanted “Education Not Incarceration” and called for divestment from prison construction and war in order to fund public education.

CURB (Californians United for a Responsible Budget which CCWP is part of) created a striking poster highlighting the fact that California is #1 in prison spending and #48 in education spending in the country. The popular poster was distributed widely and was visible on TV and internet reports of the days’ activities. On March 5th, the California Federation of Teachers began a 300 mile march from Bakersfield to Sacramento to continue building support for public education which CURB members also participated in.

March 4th demonstrated the potential for a movement that would shift California’s priorities away from prisons and to education. It is up to all of us to help sustain this commitment and to get the message out that people inside prison have a right to education as well!

Disaster In Haiti – Send us your thoughts!

The devastation, injury and suffering that the Haitian people have experienced since the earthquake in January have moved many people around the world to reach out to help in whatever ways possible. The earthquake demonstrated the enormous strength and determination of the Haitian people to get through this natural disaster despite having so few resources. The earthquake also exposed the additional problems of poverty, economic dependency and using the military as the primary means of delivering aid. Within a couple of days after the earthquake, thousands of U.S. troops were sent in to “secure” the situation in Haiti. For every one dollar of U.S. aid to Haiti, 33 cents has gone to the U.S. military. One of the reasons given for prioritizing “security” was that 4,000 people had escaped from a local prison during the earthquake.

Some California prisoners have told us that they couldn’t stand to watch the T.V. news—it was too painful and heartbreaking. Some people have pointed out that watching thousands of Black Haitians in such distress seemed like a horrible re-run of Hurricane Katrina. One person imagined a program where prisoners could volunteer to help out in Haiti and other disasters when there was such a crying need.

In Nebraska, prisoners who earn barely $1/day convinced the Department of Corrections to make an exception to the rule that allows them only to send money out to support immediate family members. The prisoners wanted to take up a collection for Haiti relief. A check for $2025.31 was mailed directly to the Red Cross.

What have been your reactions? Please share your feelings and thoughts with The Fire Inside.
Parole Beat

Precious Releases…

Rosie Maria Sanchez—On March 19, after 23 years, Rosie Sanchez was released from CIW. She maintained her innocence throughout her incarceration. Sam Bubrick, the judge in the case wrote to the board, “The jury’s decision in her trial has always continued to haunt me because it was one of the few times in my 59 years as a lawyer that I think justice was not served.” She has reunited with her four adult children and grandchildren as a free woman. “She was happy, crying, she kept saying, ‘I’m coming out, babies. We’ll be together soon,’” said her 31 yr-old son. There was tremendous public support behind her release.

Pending Releases ...

These women have been found suitable by the Board of Prison Hearings and are somewhere in the 120 day period for that decision to go through the review process by the full board or in the 30 day period for review by the Gov.’s office.

Check out our website for sample letters of support
www.womenprisoners.org
Email the Gov. directly: http://gov.ca.gov/interact
Fax Gov.’s office your letter: 916-558-3160.

Molly Kilgore having served 31 years on a seven-to-life sentence was found suitable for parole on December 30. Her case is now before the governor whose deadline to release a decision is May 29, 2010.

Cynthia Feagin has spent over 17 years at VSPW for a 15-to-life sentence. The mother of the victim publicly supports Cynthia’s release.

Patricia Joellen Johnson now 66, has been imprisoned since 1991 on an 18-to-life sentence. Jurors in a new trial wrote letters to the Board expressing their firm belief Ms. Johnson was not a danger and should receive a parole date. Register your opinion with the Gov. by June 3rd, 2010.

Frankie Williams—a 72-year old grandmother who was found suitable for parole on February 4, 2010, has a loving extended family who are eager to welcome her home. Register your opinion with the Gov. by June 3rd, 2010.

Linda Lee Smith—incarcerated over 30 years, has been found suitable 11 times by the BPH! She works as a peer helper, teacher and minister in the Mental Health Department for troubled women in the prison. Register your opinion with the Gov. by July 1, 2010.

Ivy Martin has made tremendous contributions to community inside and outside of prison as a volunteer for Literacy Volunteers of America, and as a valued contributor to Free Battered Women. Register you opinion with the Gov. by July 8th, 2010.

Marisol Garcia is a survivor of abuse. She became fluent in English, is a leader in Convicted Women Against Abuse, volunteers for the community through Mexican American Resource Association and Sharing our Stitches. Register your opinion with the Gov. by July 9th, 2010.

Outrageous Denials…

Linda Rodriguez—in Governor Schwarzenegger’s own words, “At 60 years old now, after being incarcerated for more than 19 years, Rodriguez has made some creditable gains in prison . . . Moreover, she has received positive evaluations from mental health and correctional professionals over the years”, (from Gov.’s decision, March 19, 2010) He, nevertheless, reversed the decision of the BPH to release Linda on parole!

Romarilyn Baker—a domestic violence survivor incarcerated 21 years since age 24, was found suitable for parole in November 2009 after the court ordered the BPH to give her another hearing. The Gov. reversed her parole on April 29th. She has obtained a Ph.D. in Christian Counseling and has not given up faith. All of CIW is rallying behind her. In a recent letter to CCWP she wrote, “Keep fighting the good fight of faith, remember we WIN!” The reversal will be appealed and she will have another board hearing in November, 2010.
It’s Your Health

In November 2009, California prisoners received notification that many of the daily medicines and vitamins they have relied on to keep themselves healthy and manage routine colds, coughs and stomach problems would no longer be available through the pharmacy. Cough drops, digestive aids, muscle rub and vitamins were among the many items that will now have to be paid for and many of these may not even available through canteen or the vendor package system. The notice claimed that there isn’t proof that these items actually help one’s health. The real reason for the change is to cut costs—and to do it at the expense of prisoners’ health!

When a Federal Receiver was first appointed to the California prison system in 2006, prisoners began to get better access to care. After months of sensational media accusations that the current Receiver, Clark Kelso, is seeking “Cadillac care” for prisoners, he shifted his focus away from the mission of the Receivership—protecting prisoner health. His new focus is on controlling costs to comply with comply with Gov. Schwarzenegger’s mandate to cut $811 million from next year’s prison health care budget. Kelso’s proposals include further restrictions on the use of prescription drugs and outside medical specialists, expansion of telemedicine (where patients only see doctors via video conferencing), and allowing temporary medical parole for prisoners who are physically incapacitated. While medical parole might be worthwhile, Kelso made it clear that the motivation, “…is a budget issue, not compassionate release. It’s not ‘Oh we feel sorry for these people.’ This is simply the most cost-effective way to provide treatment.”

Kelso also created bottlenecks preventing prisoners from gaining compassionate release. He continues to push for building a new multi-million dollar, 1,734-bed prison hospital in Stockton. New prison hospitals are not the answer to the prisoner health care crisis. First and foremost, the prison population has to be reduced to provide basic medical treatment, as the three-judge panel ruled in August 2009. Preventive medicine, a decent diet, and the elimination of the co-pay system could improve health care now without building new prison hospitals.

Write to the Receiver and tell him that cutting access to vitamins and digestive aids will not save money in the long run and will only make the prison health crisis worse: Clark Kelso, California Prison Health Care Services, PO Box 4038, Sacramento, CA 95812-4038.

Or call the Inmate Health Care Inquiry Line at 916-324-1403 with your concerns.

AB2232 Threatens to increase co-pays

AB 2232 is a cost cutting measure which proposes to double the co-pay for accessing medical services from $5 to $10 as a way of reimbursing CDCR for medical expenditures. If a prisoner doesn’t have enough money on her/his account for the co-pay, she would incur a “medical debt” that would have to be repaid before she was allowed to purchase other goods. Such a terrible increase in the co-pay will further discourage prisoners from accessing care and probably delay treatment until a condition becomes acute and more expensive to treat. CCWP, LSPC and other sister organizations have sent strong letters opposing this bill to the Assembly Public Safety Committee.

H. Pylori reaching epidemic proportions

We hear from people inside that H. Pylori is again on the rise in California’s prisons. The Fire Inside ran an article about it in our Summer 2003 issue. We discuss what it is, how people become infected with it, what are the symptoms, how you tell you have it and what you can do about, especially given the shortage of options in prison. If you are concerned and would like to see the whole article, please write to us, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, 1540 Market St. suite 490 , San Francisco, Ca. 94102. It is also available on-line at http://www.womenprisoners.org/fire/000350.html.
California Coalition for Women Prisoners invites and encourages all women and transgender people who have been or are on the inside to send us your writing, letters, artwork, or poetry.

The next issue will be on immigration. Send us your thoughts, experiences, lessons you’d like to share.

We will not use your name unless you check the box below

☐ I want my name to appear in the newsletter to identify my work, see attached pieces

Name:

Mail to:

California Coalition for Women Prisoners

Save Jamie Scott! Demand justice for the Scott sisters!

In the Fall 2009 The Fire Inside we wrote about the outrageous injustice in the Scott sisters case.

Jamie and Gladys Scott received two consecutive life sentences for a 1993 armed robbery in which no one was hurt and $11 was taken. This is turning into a death sentence for Jamie who suffers from end stage renal disease, relying on dialysis to survive. The medical care Jamie Scott is receiving at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Pearl, MS amounts to criminal malpractice. The portable dialysis machine at the prison breaks down, contributing to multiple complications and infections. The most recent time Jamie was taken out to a hospital the doctor insisted that she must stay for proper treatment, but the Mississippi Department of Corrections took her back to prison.

As Jamie writes, “The conditions in quickbed area are not fit for any human to live in. I have been incarcerated for 15 years 6 months now and this is the worst I have ever experienced….I have witnessed many inmates die at the hands of this medical care. I do not want to be one of them.”

Please take action to save Jamie Scott’s life. Let these officials below know that you demand decent medical care and immediate release for Jamie Scott, #19197

Christopher Epps, Commissioner MDOC
601-359-5600, CEPPS@mdoc.state.ms.us
723 North President Street, Jackson, MS 39202

Governor Haley Barbour
P.O. Box 139, Jackson, Mississippi 39205
1-877-405-0733 or 601-359-3150

For more information on their case see: http://www.freethescottsisters.blogspot.com/ and write to their mother: Mrs. Evelyn Rasco, POB 7100, Pensacola, FL 32534

Addressing healthcare inside
Wilson Moy and Ashley Moss, CCWP high school interns

In 2006 Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Diseases” (WORLD) highlighted the life of Beverly Henry, who tested co-positive for HIV/HepC in 1994. Ms. Henry was in and out of jail since she was 15 years old. By 18 she was addicted to heroin and cocaine. After she found out her status, she felt hopeless until she learned more about her disease. She was released in Oct. 2009 (see The Fire Inside #41, Fall 2009 dedicated to her.)

Unfortunately, in America’s Prison Industrial Complex people are denied health care. Prisoners strive for better health care. “Barriers to Basic Care” (2006) quotes Stephanie Walters Searight, “I wait to see the doctor.... They say don’t worry. You will see him soon.” Prison systems claim that the doctors that they hire are professionals, but they prove to be unfit for the job.

“Correctional Health Care: A Public Health Opportunity,” states that, “Because of the high yearly turnover, the criminal justice system can play an important public health role... by controlling communicable diseases in large urban communities.”

Health care needs to be more in the prisoners’ hands. We must take the initiative of people inside and outside the prisons to improve health care for all.
Come work with us!
California Coalition for Women Prisoners meetings on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of every month at 6pm
1540 Market St., rm 490, San Francisco
Write to us or call us (415) 255-7036 x314
www.womenprisoners.org
fax: (415) 552-3150
email: info@womenprisoners.org

CCWP Mission:
CCWP is a grassroots social justice organization with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families, and communities most impacted in building this movement.

Yes, I want to subscribe to The Fire Inside!

☐ Enclosed is $25 for a subscription. This supports prisoner subscriptions.
☐ I would like to be contacted about getting involved

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