

TIME/CUT

Indiana Prison Newsletter

Issue #11 • Spring 2023

Reflections on Prisoner
Solidarity Organizing

Mutual Aid Inside

Abolition &
Criminalized Survivors

In Memory of Angaza
Iman Bahar

Restricted Status
Housing Unit at ISP

Presented by:



TIME/CUT

is a publication for Indiana prisoners and their family and friends. It includes news, thoughts, and helpful resources from inside and outside the walls and around the world. The articles in the publication do not necessarily reflect on its contributors, creators, or distributors. Its contents are for informational purposes only. Time/Cut does not provide legal assistance or romantic arrangements.

This publication depends on the interest and participation of prisoners in Indiana and their loved ones on the outside. Please send us any of the following to the address below: responses to Time/Cut and its contents, helpful tips for navigating prison, sharing your experience, strategies for building our collective power, and more. Please state explicitly if you'd like your contributions to be considered for future issues and if you'd like your name published with it. Time/Cut, PO Box 30253, Indianapolis, IN 46230 or timecutindiana@riseup.net.

Please write to us for a catalogue of other articles and texts related to surviving prison. This publication is free to friends and family of prisoners in Indiana. If you do not already receive it but want to, please write us and we will add you to our mailing list. If you wish to stop receiving it, write us and we'll take you off. If your incarcerated loved ones would like to receive the inside version, please send us their address. Thanks for reading!

IDOCWatch.org/Timecut

Table of Contents

An Open Letter to Current and Former Prisoners, Their Families, Friends, and Comrades by Shaka Shakur #996207 (in Virginia DOC), BlackAgendaReport.com.....	4
Practical Abolition from the Inside Out: Reflections on Prisoner Solidarity Organizing from ItsGoingDown.org.....	5
PLANT PROFILE: Passionflower.....	8
Mutual Aid Inside: How Incarcerated Communities Survive Together by James Jones & Caren Holmes, ShadowProof.com.....	9
I DO NOT Want Peace by Malik Muhammad # 23935744 (in Oregon DOC)	14
‘Truth never dies. It’s only rediscovered.’ Indy Man Exonerated after 25 Years in Prison by Rich Nye, WTHR.com.....	14
Human Rights Attorneys Urge UN to Review the Solitary Confinement of Black Americans by Cheyenne M. Daniels, TheHill.com.....	15
Let’s Abolish Systems That Criminalize and Punish Survivors of Abuse by Kwaneta Harris # 01605894 (in Texas DCJ) & Leigh Goodmark, TruthOut.org.....	16
Rest In Power: Angaza Iman Bahar.....	17
Arizona Prisoners Find Hope in Their Fight Against Forced Induction by Victoria Law, TheNation.com.....	18
Bills of Interest from Indiana’s 2023 Legislative Session.....	19
Statement from Anarchist Prisoner Dan Baker on State Execution of Tortuguita by Dan Baker # 25765-509 (in Federal BOP), abcf.net.....	19
Prison Deaths Increased by 50 Percent in the First Year of the COVID pandemic by Sharon Zhang, TruthOut.org.....	20
Over 85 people Incarcerated at Washington Detention Center Go on Hunger Strike by Alexandra Martinez, PrismReports.org.....	21
‘No Pain is Like Mine’: On International Women’s Day, palestinian Female Prisoners Endure ‘Harsh Condi- tions’ from PalestineChronicles.com.....	22
Prisoners of the Restrictive Status Housing Unit at Indiana State Prison Petition Seeking Redress for Constitutional Rights Violation.....	23
Lawsuit likely if ban on gender-affirming surgery for people in state prisons becomes law by Brandon Smith, WFYI.org.....	25

An Open Letter to Current and Former Prisoners, Their Families, Friends, and Comrades

by *Shaka Shakur*

from *BlackAgendaReport.com*

Feb 2023

“We cannot go through decades of this physical and psychological abuse behind these walls and think We are coming home undamaged, without scars,” explains New African political prisoner Shaka Shakur.

January 23rd, 2023

Today I lost a close brother and comrade in arms to the streets. Another casualty of the consequences of the Prison Industrial Complex failed policy of catch & release on the one hand, and, on the other, not having internalized Our politics to the level of being able to resist the pull and seduction of the streets.

This brother was a Co-Founder of IDOC Watch while still in prison. Back in the 90’s, when we were in prison together, I initiated his politicization by introducing him to the New Afrikan POW Journals and he took off from there and joined Our struggle to Free The Land!!

This letter isn’t so much about Comrade Angaza (G) as it is to and about all of Us who have been trapped behind enemy lines, have grown up or did decades behind the iron curtain of the Prison Industrial Complex and who are struggling to find Our way on them streets or have failed the test only to return back to prison.

This is for some of Us who get out and have a support structure or team and still can’t gain our balance, who still can’t resist the temptation of the streets or that of reactionary conduct. Also for those who have nothing but Our survival instincts and maybe a certain level of consciousness and a desire not to return back behind these walls.

While I don’t want to make this solely about G, I have to use him as well as myself as an example.

Here is a rade who did close to 30 years in prison. A rade who got out and then hit the ground running. A rade who had support to start a small business, who had access to significant resources, who was politically active in the community, who was organizing around prison abolition and who was walking the talk, walking the straight and narrow only to have the State send the Swat Team at him for a NONEXISTENT TECHNICAL VIOLATION and send him back to prison, only to have the federal court to ORDER his release and discharge a year later.

He tried to regain his rhythm. Although once again he had everything placed before him and all he had to do was step into the shoes, he couldn’t resist the pull, the neo-colonial seduction

of the streets, of returning back to that comfort zone of the hood and the hood elements. My brother, like many of Us couldn’t come to terms with those demons with which all of Us who have lived this experience wrestle.

The demons of PTSD, of Rage, Anger, Depression, Self-Medication, of Impatience. Issues that we all have or go through even if we are unable to identify their interconnectedness in real time. We Struggle.

Herein lies the problem. Often too many of Us are too afraid or ashamed to admit that We need help, that We need some form of therapy or counseling. False Masculinity and an inability to be honest with self and self critique has led so many of Us to a premature death or back to the penitentiary that it is both sad and fucking unnecessary!!

We are not these mythical superheroes. We cannot go through decades of this physical and psychological abuse behind these walls and think We are coming home undamaged, without scars. We cannot live decades on battlefields, in warzones, hyper-masculinized environments and try to return to so-called Civilian Life as if We are just changing shoes!! We got to be Proactive on this. Ain’t no Veteran Affairs office for Us. Ain’t no Stand Down for Us and all too often it ain’t even a Stand Up for Us!!

We got to be real about this. If you’re genuinely trying to reach for Us but you are still trapped within your own traumas, you can’t be of any real help to Us until you try and recover, until you heal yourself.

GANGSTERISMMASQUERADINGASREVOLUTIONARY POLITICS:

“Once you become conscious there is no such thing as becoming unconscious, only that of betrayal”.

If you’re suppose to be political, suppose to be conscious or self-identifying as a revolutionary or freedom fighter, but you are organized as a crew, toting guns unnecessarily, in the so-called “game”, dropping bodies and/or hitting licks and you ain’t standing up against those who hold the power and foot on your collective necks, you’re engaging in gangsterism, while draped in revolutionary garb.

You might look the part, talk the part, you might even be politically active on some levels, but when you’re damaging the same community you profess to represent, when the same people you suppose to be fighting for are afraid of you or know that your crew are killas and see you as gangstas, you ain’t practicing revolutionary politics or even engaging in revolutionary struggle. You’re engaging in Warlordism.

Again it’s easy to fall into this trap because of Our (un) development and experiences. If you came to prison as a young

man who was in the streets, street organization affiliated or spent any significant amount of time in prison other than at a minimum security, then you're likely to have been exposed to serious levels of violence, i.e. murders, stabbings, rapes, police violence and just generally an environment where you are taught and trained to be vigilant, use to being armed or having ready access to a weapon.

For 17 years, I grew up in an environment where wars, riots, race riots, takeovers and hostage situations could explode on a dime and without warning. Comrade Angaza had 27 yrs of this. So after living in such a hyper-violent environment, We take this tendency to stay armed, to strike first if necessary. We take this social conditioning home with Us. It don't matter the environment. It can be the so-called hood or the suburbs. We take Us wherever We go. People say why do you want to be out after midnight or the wee hours of the morning? Because in prison generally you aren't allowed out after dark. You can't breathe the night air, look up at the stars or the moon. When you get out of prison it feels free to just be able to enjoy the night air. To roam like the caged animal you have been treated like.

We cannot continue to lose valuable comrades and brothers to this cycle. WE GOT TO LEARN HOW TO LOVE OURSELVES AND VALUE OUR SELF WORTH.



Practical Abolition from the Inside Out: Reflections on Prisoner Solidarity Organizing

from ItsGoingDown.org
Feb 2023



In the US and Canada, it doesn't get that much lower than the prisoner. Excluded in every way, stripped of their most basic rights, exposed to humiliation and violence regularly, deprived of basic necessities, prisoners are at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, scorned and blamed by all the other classes. Prison crystalizes all forms of oppression and also props them up, and so organizing around prison can be a way of getting at the core of exploitative power relations in a community.

In Hamilton, our local prison is right in middle of the city, in between the cheap grocery store and the beer store. We pass it all the time, and it literally casts its shadow over us. Our goal in starting the Barton Prisoner Solidarity Project (or BAPSOP) in 2018 was to "thin the walls" and make it so we could hear the voices of our neighbours on the inside, make them feel a little

less alone.

With this text, we want to explain some of the philosophy behind our group and make a case for a certain way of approaching prisoner solidarity organizing — and maybe even solidarity organizing in general.

What We Do

Our activities as a group include maintaining a phone line and PO box in order to be in touch with prisoners and both provide direct support and monitor conditions inside. We also keep up social media accounts and work with the mainstream media to share news about what is going on inside. We also occasionally hold rallies or other public events to put pressure on the prison.

These are simple activities, but they are powerful. Our goal is to change the balance of power inside the prison by supporting prisoner self-organizing. We do this by working with prisoners to identify issues and help them develop tactics for pressuring the institution. We also advocate around conditions, develop relationships, and do favours for prisoners, because we want our neighbours on the inside to feel respected and cared for when they come out, rather than like the shit on society's boot.

There are some things that we don't do. We don't do long-term case work, following prisoners through their process, trying to get them better outcomes in the courts, or providing support when they get out. We do random favours, like helping with a three-way call or sending a few texts or finding a lawyer, but we don't go much further than that. We don't give anyone money or legal advice. We don't do popular education for non-prisoners, and we aren't trying to grow as an organization. BAPSOP is a closed collective doing some specific work, and we intend for it to stay small and focused. Other prisoner solidarity groups have struggled to keep going because the level of need is so high that they take on many different kinds of work and burn out — by being clear about what we do and don't do, we hope to make our project more sustainable.

Philosophy

There are other groups that do prisoner solidarity work, but our philosophy makes BAPSOP different.

A big piece of that is political clarity — we are anarchists and we are always fully against prison. Folks on the inside know who we are and what we stand for, which is part of not just being another service organization. We get into the details of what goes on inside the prison (like, we know if laundry came on the day it's supposed to and which sergeants are on duty), but we are here because we want to destroy the institution.

The reason we don't do outreach work and don't seek new members is that the site of struggle is the range. Our goal is to shift the balance of power between prisoners and the institution that oppresses them. If we win, we win on the range. We are not trying to create change by pressuring the government, changing

people's opinions, getting more funding for programs, or anything like that. We want change to happen because the administration is forced to reckon with an organized body of prisoners and supporters that is capable of pushing back on their authority.

Struggle is constant — wherever there is oppression, there is resistance, and people tend to resist spontaneously at the site where authority is exercised over them. In prison, that site is the orders from the guards and the rhythm of the day. When we set out to support prisoner struggle, we look at the ways resistance is already occurring organically and ask how can we encourage it to deepen and spread.

It is not enough for people doing prisoner solidarity to simply repeat the demands from inside. We believe that people on the inside and on the outside have different goals and roles. This is a way of dealing with the tension around demands related to reform versus abolition.

We are against prison and against reforming prison, and we also make specific demands based on what prisoners are asking for. However, demands are slippery — the nature of a demand changes when it travels from the inside to the outside. Inside, a small demand can become explosive, with no limit to how much it can escalate. It is no exaggeration to say that people have died over an early lockup. But on the outside, that same demand is just a mild policy disagreement, and we would just be reformists dialoguing with power if all we did was repeat it.

To resolve this tension, we need to understand what our role is as people in solidarity and therefore what our goals are. The role of prisoners is to win concrete struggles and build their power; the role of people on the outside is to destroy prison. We support them to win inside, but we don't make their demands our own — we stay focused on destroying prison brick by brick while also calling on the admin to negotiate with prisoners to meet their demands.

What Organizing Looks Like

In the four years our group has been around, one of the main forms prisoner struggle has taken is the hunger strike, and here we are going to walk you through the process of how a typical hunger strike happens.

First though, hunger striking as a tactic is not well understood. The prison system is used to hunger strikes, and an individual doing it to try to produce a crisis by affecting their own health is unlikely to succeed. The prison treats it as no different than other forms of self-harm and has policies and procedures in place to funnel you into the medical system. Collective hunger strikes are different — rather than trying to create a health crisis, they create a crisis of mass disobedience and refusal.

Prison tries hard to get prisoners to participate in their own incarceration. You have to participate in programs, talk to

a psychologist, cooperate with guards, take on prison jobs, and follow all orders in order to receive privileges within the system. Without the participation of prisoners, the fundamental violence of the prison system is laid bare and the prison is left with no choice but to govern by force.

In a hunger strike, prisoners are refusing to take their meals, one of the most basic acts of participation they are invited to engage in. Typically, prisoners would also refuse to have their strike medicalized by not cooperating with the daily medical exams the prison tries to force on you when you are refusing meals, which further throws a wrench into the prison's procedures.

Here is how it often goes down:

First, we establish contact, usually by phone. We write our number on a banner and hangout around the prison where people can see us.

We get calls, we listen, we take detailed notes

We build relationships on as many ranges as possible and try to get people calling us regularly to keep us posted about conditions.

Once we have some relationships, we try to identify organic organizers, the people who are already talking to folks on their range about collective problems. We also try to cultivate organizers by encouraging people to take their complaints about conditions to other people on their range and get on the same page about what is wrong.

We then compare notes across different ranges, telling people who call us about the problems elsewhere in the prison. This gives us and the inside organizers an overall picture of conditions in the prison.

We support prisoners in creating lists of demands and building support for the list on their range. This is done in one of two ways: either through an assembly, where the TV is turned off and everyone on the range discusses together, or quietly, where the demands are circulated in one-on-one conversations and the written list grows and evolves.

Demands have included: an end to lockdowns, access to books sent from outside, daily yard time, faster mail, access to hygiene supplies, visits, additional canteen items or the ability to hold more money, and more

We communicate the list of demands to other ranges and get buy-in so that multiple ranges are asking for the same thing. This often involves things being added to the list, which involves more conversations on the ranges that already agreed to it.

We discuss possible tactics. Here, we are careful not to push people towards any particular tactic. We try to let it emerge from what struggle already looks like inside and from the history of struggles that prisoners are aware of.

There have been actions that aren't hunger strikes (like ranges refusing lockdown or refusing to return their meal trays or vandalizing phones or assaulting guards), and we try to be clear that we are in solidarity with any form that resistance takes. We do try to emphasize that things are stronger when

they are more collective, which often involves them being planned in advance.

Prisoners in Ontario's provincial prisons do not have access to work and don't really have any programs, so the range of tactics available to them is pretty limited.

When prisoners choose to hunger strike, they can begin building a strike fund by stockpiling food.

Since the goal is not to create a crisis by ruining your own health, it is not necessary to completely abstain from food. The important thing is to refuse the prison's food — to refuse to cooperate with their feeding responsibilities. This means that with some planning, ranges can save up food, either off their trays or from canteen purchases, in order to keep more people on strike longer. The strike fund is held in common by trusted organizers and is distributed over the course of the strike.

Prisoners pick dates for the strike

We try to be clear about what we will do on the outside: we will talk to other ranges and be out with a banner at 9am on the day the strike starts to announce it, we will do social media and send out a press release, we will hold demos and do a phone zap, we will release statements and letters from people inside...

Making regular social media updates about conditions in prison is an important part of our work, and it allows for some dialogue with the friends and families of prisoners. It also means we then have some ability to reach people and mobilize if need be. The mainstream media is also super important, since prisoners in Barton have access to the local paper and all watch the local evening news. Having a good relationship with journalists looks like having a media spokesperson in BAPSOP and also arranging interviews with prisoners or writing press releases. Relying on these institutions is obviously a problem, but it has been important in our work.

Prisoners would then refuse trays and also refuse medical exams, because it is a political issue and not a medical one. They would make their demands known, sometimes by sending a letter to the superintendent through the guards. And they would engage in negotiations with higher ups, either all together or in a small group.

Typically, the strike ends when the admin makes concessions or offers a promise of change. But often these would be only partially implemented or would prove temporary, and so the cycle would repeat.

Each time the cycle repeated, the actions took less work and were stronger. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were three or four rounds of strikes, culminating in one involving over 200 prisoners, almost half the population of the prison. This coincided with a COVID outbreak, when conditions in the jail were really at their worst — a lot of the demands were about getting "back to normal," with visits, time out of cells, yard time, things like that. But in addition to winning these (sometimes more than once), prisoners also made some other gains and got items added to canteen (Mr Noodle cups!), some extra TV channels, and an overhaul of the library, significantly improving access to books.

Things have been a bit quieter since then, in large part due to mass transfers related to some construction work in the prison (these transfers seemed to target politicized prisoners, unsurprisingly). However, transfers have also been a vector for spreading discontent. For instance, one prisoner who had gotten politicized in Burnside prison in Nova Scotia worked on organizing his range in Barton before being transferred to Maplehurst (about an hour away) where he continued that work. Another prisoner was transferred from OCDC in Ottawa and found the conditions in Barton to be so much worse that even just telling other prisoners about the difference was enough to trigger a wave of organizing. Prisoners also heard lists of demands being used by prisoners in other institutions through the mainstream media, which motivated them to develop demands of their own.

Hard Stuff

There are a lot of challenges in this work that we don't always have great answers to, and we thought we would share a few of them here. Our hope is that other people will bring their own twist to this work and come up with great solutions to things we struggled with.

We had a hard time cultivating organizers and keeping track of people. Since we don't have control over when we are in contact with prisoners, we were dependent on them deciding to call us and couldn't do anything if they didn't. That meant we often didn't know if people had been transferred or sent to seg — we just stopped hearing from them, which also sometimes happened because folks just didn't feel like calling for a bit. As a result, organizers were taking some significant risks and, if they experienced reprisals, we wouldn't know and so were slow responding to support them.

Similarly, the very local nature of our project was both a strength and weakness. By focusing on one facility, we could be very reliable and also have a very thorough knowledge of conditions, but it also meant that we couldn't do much if people were transferred. This was tied to our phone plan, which made it expensive (or sometimes impossible) to receive calls from any other prison. Some groups have tried to respond to this by operating multiple phone lines for different facilities, but we have so far not done this. We do occasionally respond to calls we get from other places, especially if prisoners are reaching out to tell us they are taking action (our number really got around), but we are not able to be reliable around this.

Our closed collective model had some challenges, but it was also a strength, since it allowed us to move quickly and be nimble in responding to events, and also to develop a really good group dynamic among a handful of highly motivated people (never more than 6). But it also meant that replacing people when they left was really hard, which led to us taking a six month hiatus at one point after the phone line had been run by just two people for about a year (which is a 12 hours a day commitment, seven days a week).

Plant Profile: Passionflower

The isolation of prison extends beyond separating humans; it also separates the imprisoned from most of the rest of the world, from nature, from animals, from plants, all things that are vital to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. But for those who are allowed time out in the yard, there remain small opportunities for exploration and encounter. Here is brief profile of a plant you may be able to find growing near you.

Common name: Passionflower

Scientific name: *Passiflora incarnata*

How to identify: Passionflower is a climbing and grasping vine up to 30 ft long. Most *Passiflora* species are native to the tropics, but *Passiflora incarnata* is native to the eastern and southern US. It grows in thickets, fields, roadsides and other areas it can get full sun. The leaves are alternate and palmate with 3 or 5 lobes. The head-turning flower consists of green sepals, several white-and-blue or white-and-purple petals, and a showy corona of striped filaments surrounding 5 stamens with large anthers and a pistil with 3 knob-like stigmas. The fruit is greenish yellow, fleshy, and the size of a chicken egg. The curly-twining tendrils are a characteristic of Passionflower. It is pollinated by insects including bees but also has extra nectar on the leaves to attract ants who protect it from herbivorous insects that would otherwise damage the plant.

Encountering Passionflower:

The tender vine, leaves, flower buds, and roots are all edible and medicinal. The qualities of its medicine are relaxing, drying, and mildly cooling. The taste is relatively neutral and pleasant. Passionflower is known in commerce primarily as a sleep aid. Put simply, *Passiflora relaxes tension*. Tension of the mind, the muscles, and higher nervous system regulation. It acts on the musculo-skeleton, cardiovascular, and nervous systems as well as smooth muscle (eg the intestines and the uterus). Mentally, it is specifically for the racing, scattered mind, spiraling thoughts, and anxiety. It can lower heart rate and reduce palpitations by working on the nervous system. It relaxes muscles to reduce pain, tension, and spasm, including from delirium tremens, tetanus, and Parkinson's disease. It can be palliative for alcohol and narcotic withdrawal for both the mind and the body. It can be formulated with other herbs for pain, anxiety, panic attacks, spasm, migraine, and neuralgia.

It is gentle enough for children and the elderly and can be given for teething, anxiety, and nausea. However, too high a dose can have the opposite effect and be stimulating. The main caution with Passionflower is possible interaction with MAOI antidepressants.

Never ingest any wild plant if you're not sure what it is! Also beware of chemicals that may be sprayed in the area and don't overharvest.

References: Julia Graves, Sajah Popham, Matthew Wood, Juliet Blankespoor



The high cost of the phone line and the PO box have been a challenge at times, since the costs stay about the same every month but our ability to raise money is mostly limited to times when there is an exciting action happening. This got worse as people were transferred, since we tried to stay in touch with them, but ended up on the hook for hundreds of dollars in long distance fees. We responded to this by giving out our personal phone numbers to people who got transferred who we wanted to stay in touch with, but this has the effect of transferring costs to the prisoners and it also creates problems in terms of safety and privacy (you probably don't want your personal phone number floating around a prison with a reputation for being a friendly girl).

And as always, recuperation is never far from our minds. A lot of the demands made by prisoners are shared by the system itself — the prison system also wants less overcrowding, more programming, supports for mental health and addiction, regular schedules around range and yard time, and so on. One of the main ways the prison system reforms itself is by physically expanding, building new prisons. Some of our members have tried to respond to this by starting another project specifically opposing prison expansion, which you can learn more about here: escapingtomorrowscages.org. We have been more successful in avoiding recuperation than some other prisoner support projects, who have continued advocating for specific facilities for people with mental illnesses at the same time as the province is announcing it is building new prisons specifically for such people. But we can always do better.

To Conclude

It's not that prisoners are a revolutionary class, but there are unique opportunities in and around prison. Prison is a factory for reproducing subordinate roles within dominant power relationships by creating trauma and exclusion. When we do the work to elevate the voices of people on the inside, we can help interrupt that cycle.

In a small way, we have seen the Barton Jail become a site of politicization and empowerment, making marginalized people feel strong and supported. We can lift each other up, and the struggles for basic human dignity underway inside do make us all more free on the outside.

We in BAPSOP are no different than the people on the other end of the phone — we too risk prison through the lives we lead, and we too live in its shadow. We see ourselves as personally invested in ending the prison system, even as our motivations are also ethical and strategic. Understanding this makes it easier to step into your role in the struggle against prison on the outside — to be independently invested in fighting and winning, rather than just being a supporter.

We would love to hear your reflections and experiences. If you do prisoner solidarity work or are interested in starting, you

should definitely get in touch with us at bartonsolidarityproject@riseup.net.

Further Reading

For more on the idea that struggle is constant, we were inspired by workers' inquiry from the sixties and seventies in Italy, where the phrase used was *lotta continua*. You can check out the great book *The Golden Horde* by Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, especially the end of chapter 5 and the start of chapter 6.

For more on participation and refusal, see *Locked Up*, by Alfredo Bonnano

For more on how rebels on the inside and on the outside have different goals and roles and about how to resist recuperation, see *A Crime Called Freedom*, by Os Cangaceiros

For more on how the prison system in Canada has evolved over the last thirty years, see *Taking the Rap: Women Doing Time for Society's Crimes*, by Ann Hansen

For a summary of recent hunger strikes in Canada, including the ones in Barton, see *Chip Away at It: A Year of Covid-Era Hunger Strikes in Canada's Prisons*, by MJ Adams



Mutual Aid Inside: How Incarcerated Communities Survive Together

by James Jones and Caren Holmes

from ShadowProof.com

Feb 2023

Joseph Wilson, who is incarcerated in a maximum security state prison, believes COVID-19 worsened the existing crisis of incarceration in the United States and amplified the urgency for mutual aid practices in prison.

Such survival work, thoroughly theorized by organizers like Dean Spade, encompasses projects that work to meet people's basic needs and educate them about why we don't have the things we need in the first place.

"During the height of the covid pandemic, the residents of prison banded together to care for one another regardless of affiliation," Wilson said. "Men shared food. Some made masks. Everyone checked in on their neighbors. It was a beautiful glow around a dark cloud."

"Lots of men lost family members. They were not able to go to funerals. Some men died in prison and we, their friends and neighbors, were not able to say goodbye in a meaningful way. Grief was a bonding agent."

Joseph lost family to covid, too. "I couldn't go to her funeral and

I was distraught,” he said of his mother’s death in 2020. “Men, some of whom I’d never had more than simple conversations with, signed sympathy cards, made meals, and checked in on my mental and emotional well-being. These are the most relevant examples of mutual aid for me.”

Formal and informal mutual aid work beckons us to consider the inequalities that shape our world, and often reveals that the very systems responsible for addressing our social problems are also responsible for producing crises.

We (James Jones and Caren Holmes) surveyed and interviewed incarcerated comrades across the country and in the United Kingdom in an effort to collectivize our knowledge of the robust mutual aid practices happening inside prisons.

The people we spoke with shared experiences, stories, and strategies, confirming that—despite the best efforts of the criminal punishment system—incarcerated people keep each other alive. Small acts of care, enormous acts of courage, and “mundane forms of collective rebellion” preserve life and humanity inside prison walls.

We focus on four categories of mutual aid work: connections and relationships, advocacy, material resources, and care work. For each, we consider how conditions of falsely-produced scarcity and isolation work to destroy the bonds that facilitate our collective survival, and explore the creative and enduring mutual aid practices that persist in spite of them.

Prisons across the country are different beasts and can vary widely in everything from security classifications to facility-specific policies and customs. While we don’t claim to paint a comprehensive picture of mutual aid in all prisons, we hope to offer a few glimpses that arrived to us from different settings.

Still, there are patterns to the work. Inside prisons, letter writing, networking, storytelling, education, resource distribution, mentorship, collective mourning, nursing, nurturing, listening, and performing other rituals of mutual aid belong to the legacy of incarcerated caregivers.

People on the inside may not always name these practices as “mutual aid,” but its tenets are practiced on a daily basis and are critical to survival strategies. These practices are life-giving forces within death-making facilities. Those on the outside, who have never experienced incarceration, have an enormous amount to learn from those who have had to ensure each other’s survival under conditions of imprisonment.

Paul Cortez, who has spent 16 years in a maximum security facility, explains that, “as a prisoner, sometimes the need to just survive another day can become the sole focus of one’s existence.”

This piece is a love letter to practices of love and solidarity,

which survive despite the dehumanizing conditions of the prison system.

Connections and Relationships

Prisons seek to dismember the types of social connection that humans need to survive, subjecting people to state-sanctioned alienation through constant and multilayered forms of punishment.

Incarcerated people are disappeared from their communities, their communications are highly surveilled and restricted, and they are obstructed from building relationships with other criminalized people. Prison officials have nearly unlimited discretion to further restrict already-limited visitation and phone access.

“Isolated further and further into our own cliques, our own cells, our own selves,” Cortez explains, “we begin to lose one of the most fundamental aspects of our own humanity: connection.”

Conditions of extreme scarcity breed desperation and can lead people to burn each other. People are pushed to destroy trust between them. Compounding traumas around neglect and abandonment loom over relationships.

On Christmas Day, 2021, prisoners in one midwestern medium-security prison clamored for the few working telephones, desperate to be in contact with their families during the holidays. Pitted against each other in a situation of calculated scarcity, fights broke out and the whole facility was locked down.

Broken phones were common in the facility and prison staff could have easily anticipated how a holiday would exacerbate demand. Yet official accounts of the event turned to accusations of gang violence and the age-old myth of inmate-facilitated drug smuggling when it came time to lay blame.

In this way, prison workers not only created this crisis by ignoring weeks of complaints and work orders anticipating holiday demand, but retroactively used the violence that ensued to formalize criminalizing narratives that would justify future punitive actions, like cell sweeps and searches. That is, the facility took actions that reproduced the cycle of communications scarcity and crisis that caused the lockdown in the first place. It is this cycle that mutual aid endeavors to break.

While prisons are designed to prevent social growth and interconnectivity, people inside strategize to resist social death, building and preserving relationships in and outside of prison. According to those we spoke with, sharing phone lines, creating phone trees, passing along messages, connecting people to each other and to local activist groups, creating newsletters, and developing letter-writing networks, are all ways that people coordinate to meet the social needs of those locked inside.

Sustaining social connection is itself survival work. People on the inside who have no outside support become vulnerable because prison guards know that no one will show up for them.

Over the last four years, we organized to meet this need in the facility where James is incarcerated. Together, and in collaboration with other incarcerated organizers, we connected hundreds of people inside his facility to writers on the outside. From the seed of these connections have sprouted friendships, book clubs, commissary fundraisers, clemency petitions, poetry, and curated art shows. Our friendship and collaboration on this piece are testaments to this network and the commitment of people inside to connect with each other.

Advocacy, Organizing, and Political Education

Incarcerated people are subjected to daily indignities, institutionalized violence, and systemic neglect. Disappeared into fortified compounds, they are refused medical treatment, held in small cells without air conditioning during heat waves or without heat during cold snaps, cavity searched by guards, arbitrarily refused visitation or phone access, and transferred far away from loved ones without warning. Bare necessities such as use of the phone, visitation, and time outside are recategorized as “privileges” and are always precarious, taken away at the discretion of guards without transparency or due process.

Friends and family on the outside call and email prison officials in an attempt to intervene in the sustained mistreatment of those inside. Often called the “run around,” those advocating from outside are herded through a maze of phone calls in order to reach someone who ultimately tells them, “there’s nothing we can do about it,” leaving those inside feeling defeated and utterly powerless.

Incarcerated people bear witness to the injustices endured by a cellmate or a fellow prisoner. They know that intervening is likely to result in collective punishment. With the threat of retaliation always looming, they move strategically to de-escalate and mitigate harm.

De-escalation skills therefore become life-saving, heading off a progression of violence and punishment from guards. Many people become accustomed to “tucking your tail,” swallowing indignities, even abuse, in order to prevent the escalation of violence or retaliation of guards.

Prisoners try to remind each other that enduring such indignities does not compromise their humanity. Rocko, who’s incarcerated at a medium security facility in rural Illinois says, “a lot of the time we laugh to keep from crying or say things to comfort one another in times of duress. Kind words are the glue that prevents us from falling to pieces. While folks inside may not have the power to change a situation, they listen and extend empathy to one another.”

But tucking tail is not always an option. Rocko recounts one incident, in which prison staff failed to orchestrate an inmate’s virtual visit to attend his grandmother’s funeral. As the scheduled time approached and his door remained locked, it became clear to this comrade that the prison had no intention of honoring his visit.

Knowing only a massive disruption would garner immediate attention, everyone in the unit began yelling and banging on their doors. The uproar seemed to overwhelm the arriving officer, who nervously explained he had no knowledge of this inmate’s visit, and that he couldn’t open his cell without prior confirmation. This incited another barrage of banging and yelling from irate inmates.

The corrections officer left and returned minutes later to finally escort him out of his cell. He was late, but he made it to witness the funeral.

Miran (Mikey) Thakrar, who is incarcerated at HMP Whitemoor in the United Kingdom, gives another example of using disruption to help an incarcerated friend. He says people have coordinated impromptu noise demonstrations to demand medical attention for a person in his cell block. But disruption comes with a cost. “[Prisoners] raise complaints, verbally or formally, and end up in segregation over it, transferred or moved wings,” Miran explains.

“The prison prefers we stand alone, that way they can do what they want to, to make the prison run with the least amount of resistance!”

Prisons not only prevent collective organizing and solidarity, but intentionally strategize to create disunity, turning prisoners against each other. “Creating a sense of isolation, even within a single wing of the prison, destroys our sense of community and that leads to conflict between ourselves, which I’m sure the guards love,” he said.

Page Dukes, a formerly incarcerated researcher and organizer in Georgia agrees, “solidarity is condemned and criminalized—people inflict harm on one another in an environment of designed scarcity and desperation. Admin encourages distrust and fear, discourages community and hope.”

Despite this, she explains, “We bear witness, tell each other’s stories, share skills and resources, encourage one another to organize and resist, to hope and to create our own opportunities, to liberate ourselves and each other.”

Building on the legacies and demands of the Attica uprisings, incarcerated people have advocated tirelessly for programming and access to educational resources. Several men in a maximum security facility shared with us their experiences of studying, practicing, and facilitating restorative and transformative justice processes.

When the state would not provide, inside organizers and educators designed their own political education curriculum. Paul, who has been incarcerated for more than 16 years, explains, “there is no greater mutual aid than to educate the mind, and to help one break out of the prison of mental slavery.”

Joseph Wilson mobilizes a collective of family members connected to incarcerated people in his facility. He writes and regularly publishes a report on conditions inside the prison for families.

“At times,” he says, “I must quell rumors and suspicions on both sides of the wall. Continuing this work is important because many families are unaware of the law, how to use it, and their collective and individual political power.”

In recent months, as the corrections department worked to limit access to physical mail in his state, he and others inside coordinated outside advocacy on social media to counter threatened policy changes.

Ethel Edwards, a formerly incarcerated organizer with *Survived and Punished*, explains she consistently filed grievances to demand changes of collective conditions within the prisons where she was held. Having come home recently, she has a long list of women she continues to support and advocate for from the outside.

The things people do to advocate for each other “to thwart the system’s effects, we often don’t really acknowledge, sometimes because it’s illegal, sometimes because we’re embarrassed to admit we needed help, sometimes because we didn’t get any help even when we asked for it,” Rocko observed.

Advocacy inside prison walls is not often recognized as such, but even the small things keep people alive and in relationship with each other. “Eating meals together, listening to music or watching sports/movies, exercising or playing games, looking at magazines or pictures, imagining what kind of car, truck, motorcycle or boat you’d drive or where you’d live if you could decide, reading books and discussing the storylines and characters, or studying religious or educational material: all these activities pass the time in a constructive way and keep our minds occupied and distracted from the oppression of the day-to-day indignities.”

“It’s a miserable existence but being active gives the mind and soul something to look forward to, and dulls the hunger pains and the yearning for human touch and engagement,” he said. “It doesn’t quite satiate the longing, but it quiets it a bit.”

Material Resources

Prisons meticulously calculate the minimum calories needed to sustain their incarcerated population. Prison meals are rationed, served at unreasonable hours, and often are entirely

inedible. Folks inside supplement their portions with food from the commissary, which they are responsible for purchasing themselves. States have different baselines for the amount of money they commit to prisoners each month (in Illinois, for example, the monthly “state pay” is \$10). It is with these funds—sometimes the cents-per-hour people are paid to work—that people must buy food, hygiene products, letter-writing materials, and clothes, and cover court fees and medical bills.

While some people have loved ones on the outside who can send them money, others do not. Even those with financial support can be barred from accessing their basic necessities when prison officials place them under punitive commissary restrictions.

Sharing or doing things for another person, labeled “trading” or “trafficking,” is against the rules in most facilities. Simple human kindness or gestures as small as giving someone a snack or a bar of soap can be forbidden.

“We cook each other meals. We make cards for each other’s family members,” Miran said. “We distribute the burdens to make conditions easier to bear.”

He notes that Muslim communities who support each other are harshly targeted. Their collectivity is interpreted by Islamophobic guards and state officials as evidence of “extremism,” “terrorist plotting” and a generalized security threat. He says prison staff “try to stop large gatherings, or to make it difficult for them to share meals together in certain areas.”

This racialized targeting of a community is similarly experienced by Black and brown people, whose efforts to share or exchange basic material resources are targeted as evidence of “gang affiliations.”

Ethel explains that when COVID-19 hit, people were limited in the ways that they could support and provide for each other. When the prison stopped providing two hot meals a day, people made meals for each other. “I always fed someone who didn’t have anything,” she said.

Everyone we spoke to for this piece could recall times when they, despite endemic scarcity, provided resources for someone who needed it, such as coffee, paper, headphones, or food. Several recalled being moved by moments when they needed and received the generosity of others.

Scholar Orisanmi Burton tells this story of his incarcerated friend, Absolut, in an episode of the *Millennials are Killing Capitalism* podcast. “Absolut, and another person who was in solitary confinement, took turns abstaining from eating lunch so that the other person [could] have a double portion. So that, on that particular day, that person would feel satiated.”

“Imagine the kinds of sacrifice that it takes, the kinds of selflessness, and acknowledging of another person’s feelings. The sort of small, mundane tasks of care and tenderness are in fact, forms of rebellion.”

Burton explains that these tremendously selfless acts, “make possible other forms of struggle that might be more easily recognizable, as political. And that’s precisely why they’re forms of rebellion.”

The prisons have the power to restrict food intake by not allowing people to order from the commissary or accept commissary items from other inmates. The prison restricts not only that which feeds the body but also that which feeds the mind, controlling what can be read, which in turn controls what can be learned.

All books coming into the facility pass through a review board, who read book covers and synopses to determine if the books are “acceptable.” Most books with revolutionary or subversive messaging are denied and added to a list of restricted material.

Yet, thanks to the stubbornness of supporters on the outside, beacons of hope—books by authors such as George Jackson, Mariame Kaba and Dean Spade, to name a few—make their way inside. Reading about abolition and revolutionary ideas gives people something to discuss and hold onto, something to rally around.

Care Work

In reflecting upon the forms of mutual aid people described in interviews, the majority of experiences can be, and often are, categorized as care work. This includes organizing birthday celebrations, caring for the sick, helping to mourn and process grief, providing relationship advice, or comforting someone who has been denied parole.

Burton, who spent many years writing to and learning alongside incarcerated people, and in particular Black men, writes about how the violent and gendered segregation that takes place in prison severs cis and heterosexual men from types of gendered social reproductive labor that is most often performed by women, trans, and gender non-conforming people. While women on the outside often continue to provide enormous care and support for incarcerated loved ones, this gendered segregation forces some cis men to take up these roles themselves.

Care work thus becomes a necessity for collective survival in men’s prisons. Burton notes that, perhaps as a result of their relation to care work, many of the incarcerated men he communicates with have a “profound tenderness that is intact.” Despite the system’s efforts to harden, that tenderness becomes “part of how [incarcerated people] are able to survive.”

In the absence of grieving rituals available to people on the outside, people in prison come together to grieve lost loved

ones. “My cellmate lost his brother to gun violence,” Rocko recalls. “Together we honored him on what would have been his 24th birthday, cooking a meal together from commissary items we pay homage to our loved ones, wishing we could be with them and sending all the positive energy we have stored up inside us out to them.”

Ethel Edwards explains that humanity comes to the surface in crisis. In the women’s prison where she was incarcerated, people provided emotional support to survivors of sexual violence. Shared experiences, she explains, create conditions of compassion. When Ethel’s 21-year-old daughter was murdered during her time in prison, she found intimacy and support from other women whose children had also been murdered. She notes that “the women, around me, the mothers around me, checked on me all day long, anything I needed they slid it under my door.”

Shantee, an organizer incarcerated at a maximum security facility, notes that when inmates are summoned to the chaplain’s office, they anticipate that they will be notified of a loved one’s death. He and others inside have learned to anticipate their return with empathy, love, handmade sympathy cards, and cooked meals.

Embracing a man whose mother passed, Shantee recalls, “he knew he was not alone in his darkest moments. I asked him if he was hungry, and another brother blurted out, ‘I’m already cooking something for him!’ If he needed to talk, eat, or a shoulder to cry on, we were there for him.”

Sometimes the care work does not involve crisis, but encompasses more mundane needs. Staten Taylor, a barber locked up in central Illinois, notes, “haircuts are huge for maintaining your mental stability, you feel a piece of normality and feel better when you are looking fresh.”

These forms of care remind those inside of our humanity, our dignity, our integrity.

‘Towards Collective Survival Work’

The mutual aid that takes place inside prisons is deeply political and, more often than not, overlooked by outside organizers. When outside organizers look to build with people on the inside, they are often plugging into existing practices and networks of care work and mutual aid, not starting from scratch. These practices provide insight into the revolutionary potential of care work under deeply repressive conditions.

While they may not codify mutual aid as such, or name its counterinsurgent power, prison officials know that the collective survival tactics of prison populations undermine their authority and yet the prison system simultaneously relies on these practices to function. They know that resource sharing, adaptive communication networks, and care work chip away at the deprivation and dependency upon which their unearned and

precarious power relies.

Disciplinary tactics reveal an explicit focus on undermining sociality. It is not just commissary or phone time that is revoked for minor infractions, it is time outside of one's cell, access to news media, and in the cruelest instances, all forms of human contact.

The prison and its guards have the impunity to take away 'privileges' that people can't afford to lose – more explicitly, they have the power to restrict food intake, sensory input (through solitary confinement), and access to community. The scarcity of basic necessities is compounded by levels of control, isolation, and punishment.

Even still, people organize to survive and take care of each other.

“I'm trying to figure out how to change our thought process away from 'survival of the fittest' towards collective survival work, or social reproduction, as they call it,” Rocko said. On the inside, “we don't all have the language or a manual for these practices and sometimes we hurt each other or let each other down.”

But mutual aid work holds a promise of generating new ways to relate to one another. As Dean Spade says, “at its best, mutual aid actually produces new ways of living where people get to create systems of care and generosity that address harm and foster well-being.” The revolutionary nature of the mutual aid that takes place inside prison walls embodies this possibility.



I Do Not Want Peace

*by Malik Muhammad. incarcerated in Oregon
from AnarchistFederation.net
Feb 2023*

Malik recently shared some thoughts he had about the murder of Tyre Nichols and the public response.

I feel the response has been lackluster, like the response when the Kentucky pigs got off and Louisville didn't do anything. It's really saddening to me. I've been enraged being in here unable to do anything. I feel more helpless than ever. I don't think the family calling for peace helped any. Know this: if anything like that happens to my family or myself, I DO NOT want peace. And if it was you or yours, I'm going to war for you as well. Nobody should need the videos to get active, that's a shame, but I'm for whatever gets peoples fires alight.

People talk about how police training is good and getting better and we can “reform” with better practices and standards, but this all bullshit because the reality is, THIS is how pigs react. Traffic stops while black are a scary fuckin thing. Jesse and I

had an incident when I was leaving the VA hospital in the middle of the night for my back issues and got pulled over coming out of the parking lot and I had gun pulled and shoved through the window in my face and prolly would have been killed if Jesse didn't scream and reach over and push the cops gun... So thankfully there was a white woman in the car because if another black person did that we'd both be shot. And it was all because the cops didn't communicate that I had a gun in the car LEGALLY (I had it in the glove box) and the one cop said it was still OK for me to reach in and grab our registration but the other cop freaked when he saw it.

My family doesn't even call the police for things, they call me because they know how cops are and I tell em if something happens to y'all, I'm going to go to war. Not a single one wearing blue will be safe. Videos of the brutality won't bring change, policies won't, pleading with politicians and praying for someone else to save us won't be the answer. They're steadily increasing the police state militarizing and practicing to fight us in our neighborhoods. We need to do the same. We need to become militant and train and one day bring the fight to them. Freedom from oppression and state violence and classism cannot be given, it can't be begged for or demanded from our politicians, it can only be taken.

I'm so tired of seeing our lives taken. The young person shot during the cop city protest made me cry and when I saw them protest I wished I was out there helping organize and steering things, but I'm here and all I can do is continue to study and plan and plot and prepare my mental and spiritual for getting out and picking up.



'The truth never dies. It's only rediscovered.' | Indy man exonerated after 25 years in prison

*by Rich Nye
from WTHR.com
March 2023*

INDIANAPOLIS — An Indianapolis man is free after spending 25 years in prison for an execution-style murder. Leon Benson's conviction was overturned this week by Marion County Superior Court Judge Shatrese Flowers. Benson, 47, walked out of a state prison in Pendleton Thursday after spending more than half his life behind bars.

Lara Bazelon, director of the University of San Francisco Racial Justice Clinic, investigated Benson's case and joined legal advocates and family to welcome Benson to freedom.

“The first thing he said to us was, ‘The truth never dies. It's only rediscovered,’ which is his motto,” Bazelon said. “And he was so exhilarated. Honestly, until I saw him and I could actually give him a hug, I didn't believe it. And then in that moment, it finally sunk in, and it was just an incredible feeling

of relief and triumph.”



Credit: Lara Bazelon

On Aug. 8, 1998, Kasey Schoen, a white man, was shot five times as he sat in his truck on 14th Street, near Pennsylvania Street. The truck was running, the transmission was in drive, Schoen’s foot was on the brake.

The key witness was a white woman delivering newspapers to a vending machine 150 feet up the street. She saw a dark-skinned Black man fire shots, and picked Benson out of a photo array, but conceded in trial testimony that Benson was a light-skinned Black man.

“Sad to say more than 50% of people who have been wrongfully convicted are Black,” Bazelon said. “Most of them are Black men. Quite often it happens in these misidentification cases, where there’s a cross racial identification and the witness is firmly convinced that he or she is absolutely right. And they’re mistaken.”

Bazelon said Benson was convicted and sentenced to 61 years in prison, despite no physical or forensic evidence linking him to the murder. The investigation for post-conviction relief discovered that police failed to disclose evidence that pointed to another man named Joseph Webster as the killer.

Police found Webster in the neighborhood with a .38 handgun, the same caliber used to kill Shoен. He also was carrying dozens of rocks of cocaine. Another witness also came forward who identified Webster as being at the scene of the shooting. But the detective did not forward that evidence to the prosecutor.

This case is the first exoneration since Marion County Prosecutor Ryan Mears started the Conviction Integrity Unit in 2021. The prosecutor’s office released the following statement:

“In order to garner the community’s trust in the criminal justice system, it is critical that the integrity of the process is maintained at every point, from the investigation through post-conviction efforts.

This has been a long and difficult process for everyone involved but justice requires that we set aside this conviction.

The challenges presented in this case underline the importance

of why the Conviction Integrity Unit was established and why we continue to identify and remedy wrongful convictions and ensure that justice and fairness are upheld.”

Benson could be eligible for restitution from Indiana’s Exoneration Fund. A person can receive up to \$50,000 for every year they are wrongfully incarcerated.



Human rights attorneys urge UN to review the solitary confinement of Black Americans

by Cheyanne M. Daniels

from TheHill.com

March 2023

A group of human rights attorneys have filed a joint submission urging the United Nations to review abusive solitary confinement practices used in the U.S. against Black Americans.

The submission, which comes ahead of U.N. officials’ April trip to the U.S. to review issues related to racial justice and equality in law enforcement, details the physical and mental health repercussions of solitary confinement.

The visit is part of a four-point agenda to end systemic racism and human rights violations by law enforcement against Africans and people of African descent. It comes after the Biden administration extended an invitation to the U.N. in December.

“A lot of times there’s a focus on pretrial work and bail reform, which is incredibly important. But sometimes we lose sight of what happens to people post-conviction,” said Delia Addo-Yobo, staff attorney for Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights U.S. Advocacy and Litigation program, one of the organizations involved in the submission.

“More often than not, the people who are put in custody, pretrial or post-conviction, they’re returning to society, they’re coming back home and it’s really tragic that they’re having these deep psychological and physical wounds placed upon them.”

More than a third of people held in solitary confinement become psychotic or suicidal within the first 15 days, according to the submission. Those who have been subjected to solitary confinement are 78 percent more likely to die by suicide within a year of being released from prison.

There have also been reports of those who have spent time in solitary confinement experiencing hypertension, chronic headaches, trembling, sweaty palms, extreme dizziness and heart palpitations.

Solitary confinement can also exacerbate pre-existing conditions and cause hypersensitivity to light and eyesight deterioration.

Because of these effects, the submission says, solitary confinement is considered torture under international law.

Addo-Yobo told The Hill one of the reasons the submission focused on Black people is because not only are they more likely to face incarceration than white Americans, they are also more likely to be placed in solitary confinement.

Black men make up 40.5 percent of the total male prison population and more than 43 percent of men in solitary confinement, according to a 2019 study by the Correctional Leaders Association and the Liman Center at Yale Law School. Meanwhile, Black women make up only 21.5 percent of the total female prison population but 42 percent of women in solitary confinement.

“The United States also has a very long and unfortunately active history of weaponizing solitary confinement against Black people, Black political prisoners and people exercising their constitutional rights,” Addo-Yobo said.

The submission specifically mentions the “Angola 3”: For decades, Albert Woodfox, Herman Wallace and Robert King were held in solitary confinement in Louisiana’s Angola Prison, a former slave plantation, as punishment for their membership in the Black Panther Party. Woodfox survived 44 years in solitary confinement, the longest a person has been held in isolation in the United States.

“There’s little evidence to show that solitary confinement improves safety in the jails and prisons, and there’s actually evidence that shows that it has the opposite effect,” Addo-Yobo said. “It doesn’t keep people safer while they’re in jail. It doesn’t keep prison guards or correctional officers safe from jail. And it doesn’t keep people who are incarcerated safe while they’re there, either.”

In fact, studies have found that recidivism rates for those leaving solitary confinement were 35 percent higher than those who had not been held in solitary confinement.

Addo-Yobo said she hopes the submission will highlight the work of organizations trying to reform solitary confinement rules, including those working to pass legislation akin to the International Mandela Rules, which would prohibit those who are incarcerated from spending more than 15 days in solitary confinement.

She also wants to see mandatory public data reporting on how long and how many are in solitary confinement in local, state and federal prisons and jails, youth centers and immigration detention centers.

“We also hopefully want to tell the stories of folks who are suffering because this is an everyday occurrence, and we would like to see this practice banned, especially as a form of

punishment for prolonged periods of time,” Addo-Yobo said.

That includes an immediate ban on solitary confinement for those who have disabilities and for young people, she added.

“We want the United States to join the rest of the world in banning and strictly limiting the use of solitary confinement,” Addo-Yobo said. “It’s torture, and I believe the United States is better than torture.”



Let’s Abolish Systems That Criminalize and Punish Survivors of Abuse

By Kwaneta Harris & Leigh Goodmark

from TruthOut.org

Jan 2023

Content warning: This article describes domestic and sexual abuse, as well as violence committed by prison guards.

Thousands of the women and trans and gender nonconforming people who are doing time in U.S. prisons have been doubly victimized — hurt first by other people, and then victimized by the criminal legal system.

Taylor Partlow, a 30-year-old woman who is now incarcerated in New York, was sentenced to eight years after killing the man who abused her.

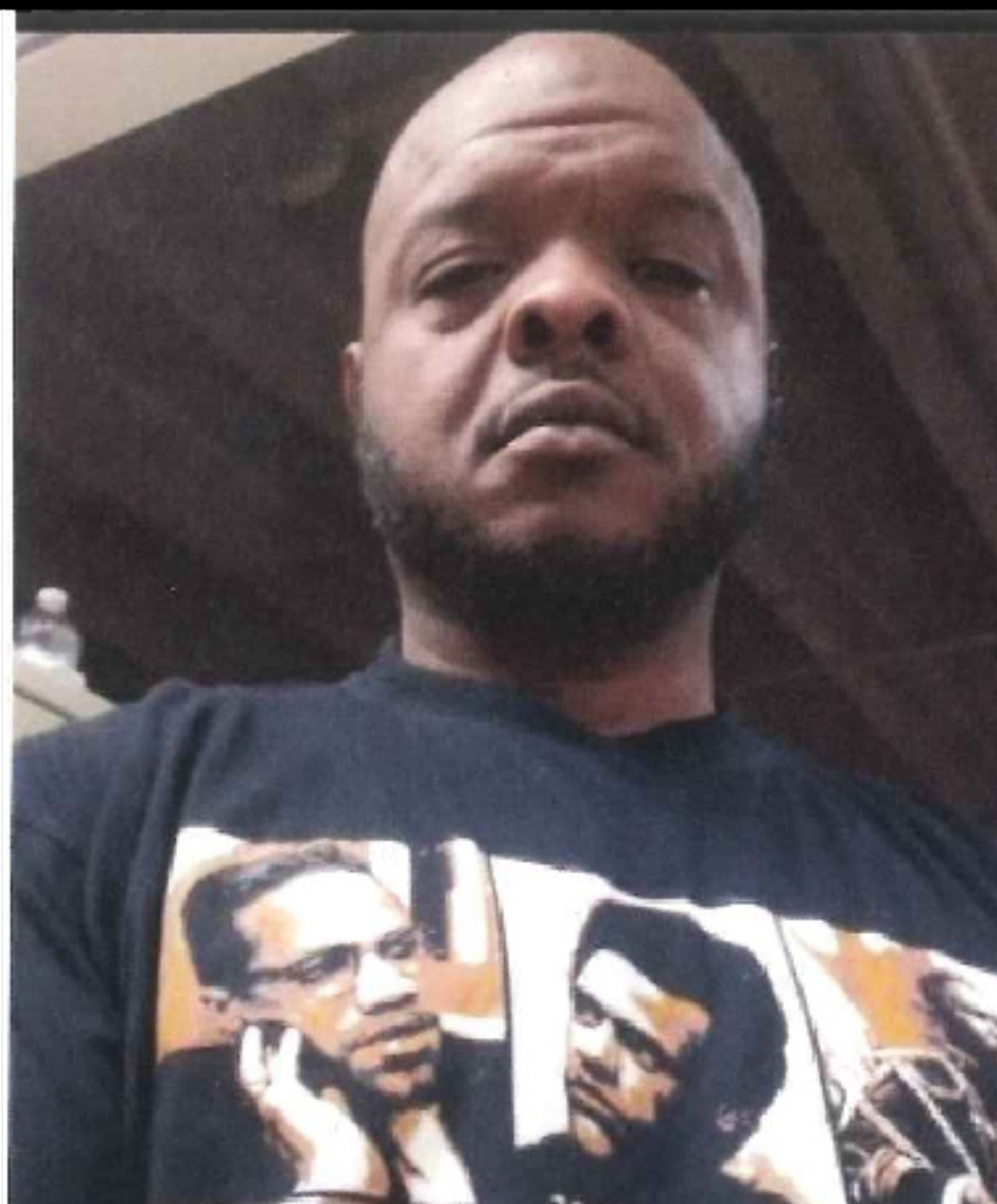
Ashley Barnett, a 34-year-old woman, served eight years in federal prison for inadvertently introducing a young woman to the men who would eventually traffic her, after years of having been sexually exploited herself.

Ky Peterson, a 32-year-old trans man who shot the man who raped him as he walked home, is now free, but was imprisoned for nine years for defending himself from the assault.

Their stories all underscore a reality that Survived and Punished — a national coalition working to support and free incarcerated survivors of violence, decriminalize the actions that survivors take to protect themselves, and abolish gender violence and the carceral state — noted in its 2022 report: “Domestic and sexual violence are often rejected as legitimate justifications for self-defense, either by the law’s design or through its interpretation and application in courts.”

Partlow, Barnett and Peterson are considered by the system to be “imperfect” victims of gender-based violence: They fail to conform to the narrow confines of “true” or “innocent” victimhood — a category reserved for victims who are white, heterosexual, cisgender, passive and compliant with law enforcement.

Victims are only deemed “perfect” if they do not use drugs



Rest in Power
Angaza Iman Bahar

December 7, 1974 - January 14, 2023

His spirit is generous and gentle. He was a passionate leader and freedom fighter, giving the next generation guidance and hope. He was incarcerated at a young age and spent many years captive to the prison industrial complex. During his imprisonment he met many abolitionists, becoming one on himself. He was an intellectual, authoring several books. As founder and leader of idocwatch and focus initiatives, Angaza was working to create a program aimed at intervening in the lives of youth targeted for incarceration to help guide them onto a better path.

In 2022, he defended himself in court, using his knowledge of law to gain his freedom, one of his proudest achievements. He is survived and remembered by many loving brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins, comrades, freedom fighters, and friends.

or have mental health issues. To be “perfect” they cannot be jealous, angry or strong, and they can never fight back. They are expected to report to law enforcement and participate in prosecution.

The failure to meet those standards makes it difficult (if not impossible) for police, prosecutors and courts to see imperfect victims as victims at all. Imperfect victims are regularly arrested, prosecuted, convicted and incarcerated for crimes directly linked to their own victimization.

Every day, the U.S. punishes victims of gender-based violence

in prisons across the country. Let’s be honest about what that looks like and what mainstream society hopes to accomplish by locking them up.

Law students are taught that there are four justifications for criminal punishment: incapacitation, deterrence, rehabilitation and retribution. Incapacitation is locking someone away so that they cannot cause further harm. Deterrence is the idea that punishment will both prevent an individual from offending again and send a message to others in society about what will happen to them should they engage in the same behavior. Rehabilitation is meant to address whatever shortcoming led to someone’s criminal activity in the first instance. And retribution is punishment proportionate to the offense committed — in biblical parlance, an eye for an eye.

Most of these rationales make little sense, especially when applied to criminalized survivors. People who break the law in response to or as a result of the violence against them are not generally dangerous and do not need to be rehabilitated or isolated from the rest of society to prevent further harm; they need protection from the people who have abused them. Few scholars believe that criminal punishment deters. Which leaves retribution. It may be that society supports the idea that criminalized survivors should be punished for their actions. But the punishment meted out in prisons in the United States is far from “proportionate.”

In Texas, for example, incarcerated women live in what are essentially rundown pizza ovens. Over two-thirds of Texas prisons are not air conditioned. As the outside temperatures climb, the people inside endure temperatures as high as 149 degrees Fahrenheit; they are essentially being cooked. Opening the small window to allow cooler air inside can mean inviting cats, skunks, rodents, snakes, frogs, birds, raccoons, possums and insects into the parking space-sized brick cell.

To paint a fuller picture of the horrific conditions and violence endured by many women incarcerated in Texas, we share below some observations and stories drawn from coauthor Kwaneta Harris’s own lived experience of incarceration in Texas.

During the summer months, some incarcerated women stop taking medications for heart, seizure and psychiatric conditions because the side effects of those medications include heat intolerance. Frequently, the water and electricity do not work. There are no smoke detectors in many prisons. Fires are not uncommon. Desperation to escape the heat leads to many suicide attempts — the goal is to be housed in the air-conditioned psychiatric center. Sometimes, those attempts become “accidental” suicides.

Sexual and physical abuse of incarcerated women in Texas is shockingly common. We can only tell their stories using pseudonyms, for fear of retaliation. “Y” was held above a correctional officer’s head, legs flailing in the millisecond

before he bounced her off the corner of her cell. Her crime? Rolling her eyes at him.

A correctional officer pulled “M” over the back of a bench by her hair, yanking some of her plaits out.

Perceived emasculation is handled with overwhelming force: Broken arms, jaws, chipped teeth and dislocated shoulders are evidence of toxic masculinity.

Correctional officers beat people up, then write them up. One Texas lieutenant was nicknamed “Sir Slam A Lot” by the incarcerated women, who watched him beat his wife up in the prison parking lot. It confirmed what the women already knew — what they do to women behind bars, they do to women behind doors.

The irony is that women who were abused are sent to a place where they are abused in the name of “correction.”

“B” was triggered by a guard’s cologne; it was the same as her abuser’s. She wet herself then crumbled to the ground, rocking. In response, the guards sprayed her bedding with it.

Witnessing such cruel brutality leaves incarcerated women feeling isolated and powerless. Eating disorders and self-harm satiate the lack of control for some. But the prison chooses to punish instead of treat. This state-sanctioned violence reinforces what criminalized survivors were told by their partners: You don’t matter.

Criminalized survivors trade one abusive environment for another. The carceral system isn’t the first harm that they experience, but it is for many by far the worst, revictimizing and retraumatizing incarcerated people. Prosecutors argue for and judges sentence victims to prison in the hopes that they will be rehabilitated and return as contributing members of society. But incarceration does not rehabilitate; it simply heaps additional trauma on people who have already endured a lifetime’s worth of trauma.

This is what the state is doing to criminalized survivors on behalf of its citizens. If voters are willing to let this continue, we should be honest about the harm that we permit in our names.

There is, of course, another option — we can fight to prevent survivors of violence from being incarcerated and to support those who already are. Groups like Survived and Punished and MUAVI in Chicago have been supporting incarcerated survivors for years, publicizing the stories of criminalized survivors, running campaigns to petition for their acquittal and clemency, and providing financial resources when they are released.

Similarly, individual survivor defense campaigns have raised awareness of the stories of criminalized survivors like Marissa

Alexander, Bresha Meadows, Nikki Addimando, Maddesyn George and Wendy Howard. In state legislatures, efforts to abolish mandatory minimum sentences and enact laws that allow judges to reconsider draconian sentences have featured the stories of criminalized survivors.

And we can do this work with an eye toward the ultimate goal of abolishing incarceration altogether. So long as police, prosecutors and judges have the discretion to criminalize survivors, they will find reasons to do so. The only way to guarantee that “imperfect victims” are no longer punished is to dismantle the system that punishes them.



Arizona Prisoners Find Hope in Their Fight Against Forced Inductions

*by Victoria Law
from TheNation.com
March 2023*

Arizona prison officials have been inducing the labor of its pregnant prisoners against their will. But shortly after the Arizona Republic broke the news, state lawmakers introduced a bill banning them from continuing to do so.

HB 2639 revises an existing statute to prohibit prison officials from compelling, coercing, or even requesting that a pregnant person in custody agree to have their labor induced.

But it may not come soon enough for two women who are spending their last trimesters at Perryville, Arizona’s sole female prison.

Sierra Stevens, now eight months pregnant, told The Nation that the prison doctor asked if she wanted to have her labor induced. He warned her that she risked giving birth in prison if medical providers could not get to her quickly once she went into labor.

Stevens refused. She and her husband had already decided on a non-medicated birth, even going so far as to engage the services of a midwife before her arrest. She recalled that the doctor reiterated that induction would be the safest choice and that she should consider it.

But induction actually isn’t the safest choice. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have long cautioned that induction, especially before 39 weeks and if not medically necessary, carries greater health risks for newborns as well as for birthing people, who are at risk for infection, uterine rupture, and bleeding after delivery.

“My mind is already made up,” she said.

This is not her first time giving birth—she had five other

children and knows what to expect while in labor. She and her husband are determined to allow their baby to come without a medical intervention—and not scheduled at the convenience of prison and hospital staff.

McCall Lunn is also expecting a new baby, a fact that she learned only after arrest.

“I was told I would be induced a week before my due date,” she told The Nation. “Other than that, I haven’t been told anything else about being induced.”

A spokesperson for the Arizona Department of Corrections told The Nation that, as a general rule, prison health care staff do not encourage women to have inductions.



Bills of Interest from Indiana’s 2023 Legislative Session

HB1006

Mental health programs. Specifies the circumstances under which a person may be involuntarily committed to a facility for mental health services and specifies that these services are medically necessary. Establishes a local mental health referral program to provide mental health treatment for certain persons who have been arrested. Repeals obsolete provisions.

HB1569

Restrictions on DOC provision of gender therapy. Provides that the department of correction may not authorize the payment of any money, the use of any state resources, or the payment of any federal money administered by the state to provide or facilitate the provision of sexual reassignment surgery to an offender patient.

SB71

Parole. Specifies that a person placed on parole following a term of imprisonment that includes a sentence for a crime of violence may be released on parole for not more than 24 months. Provides that time served while confined to a prison or jail does not count toward time served on parole.

SB343

Various criminal law matters. Makes it organized retail theft, a Level 6 felony, for a person to exercise unauthorized control over the property of a retail merchant with the intent to directly or indirectly distribute the property for resale, and increases the penalty to a Level 5 felony if certain circumstances exist. Permits a person to petition for expungement of an arrest if no charges have been filed within one year of the arrest. (Under current law, the arrest is expunged without a petition after 180 days.) Allows disclosure of expunged records to a school in connection with the employment of a person likely to have contact with a student. Repeals the requirement that certain acts taken by a prosecuting attorney are invalid without a seal.

Revises, for purposes of an enhancement and certain criminal offenses, a definition of “machine gun” to include a particular part or combination of parts designed and intended for use in converting a weapon into a weapon that fires automatically more than one shot, without manual reloading, by a single function of the trigger.

SB441

Visitation of juveniles in detention facilities. Imposes requirements on juvenile detention facilities with regard to contact and visitation of residents of juvenile detention facilities.

HB1648

Sentence modification. Establishes an additional sentencing modification procedure for certain individuals and requires that the department of correction annually review inmate records and transmit certain information to specified persons.



Statement from Anarchist Prisoner Dan Baker on State Execution of Tortuguita

from abcf.net

Jan 2023

Dan Baker is a Florida social justice activist and former army vet who went awol instead of fighting in Iraq. He was also active during the George Floyd Rebellion. He was arrested in January 2021 after the FBI compiled social media posts related to Trump supporters’ actions on inauguration day to build a criminal case against him.

Manny, who also went by the name Tortuguita, was murdered by police while defending the Weelaunee forest in Atlanta from being destroyed in order to build “Cop City”- a massive urban warfare training facility.

I just learned today that my friend Manny was murdered by cops in the Atlanta Forest.

I send my love, sympathetic outrage and condolences to everyone who knew Manny and loves them. I send their parents all my love, outrage, admiration and respect for raising this person who became a hero who put into practice the values which make human life meaningful. We need to come together as a community to take care of Manny’s family from now on. In Rojava, the families of the martyrs are shown special reverence and provided for for the rest of their lives.

As a community we need to uphold this revolutionary practice of gratitude and respect, which even this corrupt and murderous government fails to show the fallen of its own in any meaningful way. I have spent time with the parents of martyrs and if Manny’s parents are willing I will spend time with them one day and try unsuccessfully to materially repay them for

their contribution to the betterment of the world in the way they raised Manny. But we owe them a debt that can never be repaid, because the life of a single martyr like Manny is worth more than all the wealth in the world combined.

I won't pretend that I knew Manny well but I will tell you what I do know. I know that Manny heard about me, my case and what the cops and feds did to me, and that Manny was moved to tears for my sake and came to my trial. This means a lot to me. We live in a world where less than 2% of the world's water is drinkable and Manny shed precious tears for my sake. Now It's my turn to do the same. While I've been in prison Manny sent me money, wrote to me and we spoke on the phone. These simple gestures mean the world to political prisoners and to me personally.

Manny completed higher education at Florida State University, which is more than I can claim to have accomplished.

They studied a field which explored compassionate treatment for traumatized peoples. This speaks to the high quality of Their character. I am told they were a very compassionate person who felt deeply moved enough to take altruistic action to defend people, plants and animals from fascist death squads. They put themselves between those killers and what remains of the living world and they lived and died defending that worthy cause. This is a hero's death. This is what it means to give your life for a cause and for those who are precious to you. Manny is a martyr of this revolutionary struggle for liberation for all beings.

10,000 Manny's will take their place, people will name their children after them, dedicate their activism to their memory and organizations bearing their name will liberate more beings than we can measure. I will personally make sure of this for the rest of my life. Please send me everything you can about Manny's life and about this tragic murder, including their picture.

We must remember Manny. We must say their name, share their face, hang up their picture in homes all over the world, and spread their memory far and wide on every platform available.

In Rojava, when a friend is martyred by the enemy tens of thousands of people line the roads from the hospital morgue to the burial ground and chant their names, carry their pictures and celebrate the life and memories of the martyred friend with gratitude and determination to make sure their sacrifice is not forgotten, not in vain. They chant SHEHID NEMARIN – THE MARTYRS NEVER DIE. Manny lives on in our works, in our hearts and the fire in our eyes. The blood of the martyrs cries out from the soil of the Atlanta forest.

Remember Manny.



Prison Deaths Increased by 50 Percent in the First Year of the COVID Pandemic

*by Sharon Zhang
from TruthOut.org
Feb 2023*

The rate of deaths in U.S. prisons during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic increased dramatically, as lawmakers largely ignored the effect of the pandemic on imprisoned people, a grim new analysis found.

According to data from researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, deaths in state and federal prisons rose by nearly 50 percent during the first year of the pandemic, despite the fact that the population of people in prisons decreased by 10 percent. Overall, at least 6,182 people died in prisons in 2020.

This rate is more than double the increase in the rate of deaths across the U.S. overall and tops the increase in deaths at nursing homes, where COVID deaths were especially high. The rate of deaths in prisons more than doubled in six states — Alaska, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, North Dakota and Rhode Island.

As COVID-19 first swept the U.S., the virus was ravaging prisons. While a few states implemented early-release programs in response to the pandemic (only to place people in another form of imprisonment), many lawmakers and officials simply ignored the problem of COVID spread in prisons or allowed it to get worse; the Federal Bureau of Prisons lowered the rate of compassionate releases and the agency used only a fraction of the COVID drugs that it was allotted to help treat people in prison, compounding upon already inadequate health care for imprisoned people.

Meanwhile, many prisons doubled down on the cruelest forms of punishment, increasing the number of people in solitary confinement, choosing to abuse, neglect and torture people rather than releasing them in compliance with social distancing measures to avoid infection.

The UCLA data is the first comprehensive report of pandemic-era prison deaths. The UCLA Law researchers said that the data is meant to provide the public with knowledge about prison mortality rates as federal and state governments have failed to keep proper records.

Aaron Littman, Acting Director of UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project, told The New York Times that the public should know what happens to people when they are thrown into prison.

“It is essential that we as the public know what happens in institutions that incarcerate people in our name,” Littman said. “But unfortunately that has never been the case to the

appropriate extent, and it has become worse over time.”

Data on deaths in prisons has been suppressed for decades; Congress passed a bill to increase transparency of deaths of imprisoned people in 2000, known as the Death in Custody Reporting Act, but the Government Accountability Office found that the vast majority of states were submitting incomplete reports under the law.

Further, in 2021, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a branch of the Department of Justice, announced that it was going to stop collecting such data entirely. Combined with the fact that many states have stopped reporting COVID cases in prisons, data around deaths of imprisoned people is woefully lacking.



Over 85 People Incarcerated at Washington Detention Center Go on Hunger Strike

by Alexandra Martinez

from PrismReports.org

Feb 2023



Credit: Jason Redmond

Earlier this month, over 85 people incarcerated at Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington, went on a five-day hunger strike to protest worsening living conditions. According to advocates, the strike started on Feb. 1 when guards accused detainees of having contraband materials during an inspection. When detainees across units joined in protest, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers retaliated by tear gassing inmates in unit F4 and using smoke bombs and pepper spray on others. Strikers demanded an end to this inhumane treatment, as well as access to better medical care and COVID-19 preventative measures, timely and warm food service, clean bedding and attire, lower telecommunications and commissary prices, among other basic necessities. Detainees ended the strike on Feb. 6 after ICE officials promised to meet their demands, though many say their food is still arriving late and other conditions have yet to be met.

La Resistencia, a grassroots organization in Washington state led by undocumented people in solidarity with detainees at

NWDC, is fighting to close the facility and end all detentions and deportations. Jose Hernandez, who was on hunger strike, told organizers with La Resistencia that he was fighting for medical attention and the rights of everyone detained at the facility.

“I won’t stop until I see results,” Hernandez told organizers. “This isn’t just about me, it is about everyone.”

According to a statement from an ICE spokesperson, upon discovery of an inmate possessing a contraband comb with razor blades used to cut hair, “the noncitizens involved refused to follow orders and became non-compliant. After careful consideration, ERO [Enforcement and Removal Operations] authorized non-lethal use of force following applicable guidelines to ensure the safety of all people in the facility, including noncitizens and staff. Once the incident was resolved, all detainees were evaluated by on-site medical staff and cleared with no injuries. Medical staff confirmed there were no detainees with suicidal ideation.”

Detainees, however, tell another story. One protester told La Resistencia that the officers treated them poorly and would pepper-spray inmates indiscriminately—including those who were sick.

“They don’t care about us, and it isn’t right,” said the protester to La Resistencia organizers. “What they’re saying in the news are lies. Nobody was resisting them; we are just trying to be peaceful.”

Another detainee told La Resistencia that, even though their unit was not directly tear gassed, they could still smell the fumes.

“Our unit is directly above F4 and is connected to the same ventilation system,” they said. “As a result, we were breathing in these gasses for about 3 hours! The [GEO] guard would not call for help, and we were suffocating, begging for help while the guard just told us to deal with it. I actually called the federal public defender’s office and begged the receptionist to call the fire department for about five minutes. One of the detainees started kicking and clawing at the door hysterically trying to get out to get fresh air.”

Owned by the private prison corporation GEO Group, NWDC is notorious for its mistreatment of inmates, lack of sanitation, medical neglect, and overuse of solitary confinement. According to a report by the University of Washington Center for Human Rights, the NWDC has weaponized solitary confinement against prison organizers and those facing mental health issues. According to ICE data, the facility also detains people longer, on average, in solitary confinement than any other dedicated ICE facility in the nation.

Chad Faulkner, an Australian national and suicide-risk detainee,

was forcibly held in solitary confinement at NWDC on Jan. 29. During a phone interview, Faulkner told Prism that he asked his officer to let him take a shower and was dragged to solitary confinement instead, injuring his limbs in the process.

“I told them, I’m not supposed to be down here, I’m on a mental health observation,” said Faulkner.

According to Faulkner, the officer forcibly held him down despite Faulkner’s pleas to call their supervisor. Faulkner said he was scratched, bruised, and had cuts all over his hands.

“I started crying,” said Faulkner. “I was crying, screaming, telling them to stop, and they didn’t stop.”

This was not the first time detainees like Faulkner experienced abuse at the hands of NWDC authorities. On Dec. 5, 2022, Faulkner went on hunger strike to protest malnourishment, harassment, and having his belongings rummaged through without consent. Before him, on May 13, 2022, 13 detainees also went on hunger strike to protest inhumane conditions at the facility. Similar to the recent hunger strike this month, strikers were threatened with pepper spray before being placed in solitary confinement.

“This is nothing but a business for both GEO and ICE. They both benefit from having people in detention, and they will do anything necessary to not only keep their business running, but also to keep this a secret prison,” said La Resistencia co-founder Maru Mora-Villalpando. “They abuse people, and they don’t want anybody to know.”

Faulkner has been awaiting deportation at NWDC since Oct. 20, 2022, when his case was finalized.

“I would love to be free,” said Faulkner. “I would love to be free to go right back to my mom. She needs me.”



‘No Pain is Like Mine’: On International Women’s Day, Palestinian Female Prisoners Endure ‘Harsh Conditions’

from PalestineChronicle.com

March 2023

29 Palestinian female prisoners are currently held under harsh conditions in Israeli prisons, subjected to a systematic policy of medical negligence, Palestinian prisoners’ support and human rights group Addameer said.

Releasing the figures on March 7, the human rights organization took the opportunity to raise awareness of the plight of two 16-year-old teenagers who are among those detained.

According to Addameer’s report, several female prisoners are

injured while 15 suffer from various health issues, in addition to six mothers, two minors, and a female prisoner who are under administrative detention.

Among them, there is Israa Jaabis, 36, who was arrested in October 2015 after a faulty cooking gas cylinder in her car burst into flames 500 meters from an Israeli checkpoint in the occupied West Bank.

Jaabis was severely wounded in the blaze, suffering 65 percent burns across her body. Israeli occupation forces accuse her, who has a ten-year-old son, of attempting to harm Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint near the site of the explosion. No evidence was presented and she vehemently denied the charges.

Despite her debilitating injuries, Israeli occupation authorities denied her much-needed medical attention. In 2022, they refused to perform urgent surgery to help her breathe through her nose.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Jaabis’ sister, Mona, published in Ramzy Baroud’s book “These Chains Will Be Broken:”

No Pain is Like Mine

It is too difficult to describe the first time we saw Israa’. We learned bits of information here and there about the nature of her wounds, and of the fact that some of her fingers were amputated. I thought that I was mentally prepared to see my sister in that condition, but I was wrong. [...]

I was trying to prepare my nephew, Mu’tasim, for the transformation that had taken place. I told him that his mom had had an accident and that he would be allowed to meet her soon. But he is a smart kid. Although only eight years old at the time, he searched the news and found out what had happened. But he still could not find pictures of her after the accident. I sat with him again and told him: “I love my mother no matter what she looks like, white, black or red; whether her face is blemished or not.” He said: “I love my mom, too, no matter what.” Then I showed him a photo of her that was intentionally distorted. I did not want him to actually see right away how horrific her disfigurement was. He sat in silence for a long time. He seemed emotionally disconnected, as if the story was about someone else. [...]

The first time we were officially allowed to meet with her was in HaSharon prison (Footnote). We were separated by a thick wall of glass. My mother only recognized her from her height, as Israa’ is particularly tall. My mother rested her head in her hands and said nothing; she only wept.

I kept myself from crying, though. I told Israa’: “We love you and we will stand by your side, no matter what the obstacles.” My father seemed to have lost his mind. He hobbled around

the room, crying: "Israa', sweetheart. Israa', I am your father." Israa' kept telling him: "I am Israa', Daddy. Please look, just look at me. My face is burned, but my heart, my mind and my whole being is still the same." I kept assuring him that this was Israa' but he was too confused and kept walking in circles, screaming her name. She was always a source of strength for him. When he finally realized that she was his daughter, he broke down, weeping like a child.

Israa' was the backbone of our family. When I visited her the second time, I told her: "You don't always have to be the strong one. It's okay to be vulnerable sometimes." As soon as I said that, she began crying, and she cried for a long time. [...]

A year and two months later, Mu'tasim was finally allowed to see her. He was nine years old then. I took him, as my mother could no longer cope with the pain of seeing her daughter in that condition. But the prison guards did not allow me access to her room. They only allowed Mu'tasim to talk to her from behind the glass barrier. He begged them to let him hug his mother and, finally, they relented, agreeing to allow him to spend ten minutes with her. I watched from behind the glass as Israa' walked in wearing a Tigger costume. She had sewn it inside the prison, as she knows how much Mu'tasim loves the Winnie the Pooh cartoon. She even designed and wore a Tigger mask. When Israa' was younger, she loved to dress up in costumes and perform as a clown for various community events for children. Mu'tasim told her: "I know you are my mother. I don't want Tigger. I want to see your face." So she removed the mask. Mu'tasim was shocked. His eyes filled quickly with tears. He told her: "I love you, no matter what." He told her that the "acne on your face will soon go away". When it was time to leave, he clung to her, refusing to let go. The guards asked me to intervene. Mu'tasim kept repeating: "You either let me stay, or let her come home with me."

On the way home, Mu'tasim told me, after a long silence: "My mom will always be beautiful, even if the acne never goes away."

My heart breaks for Israa', my tall, slender, sister with a beautiful face, the lovely one whose hands were always adorned with henna. In her we saw hope, strength and beauty. The harshness of the occupier scarred her face and body, amputated her fingers and is relentlessly trying to break her spirit. I will never forget when a journalist asked her across the court room, as she sat surrounded by armed Israeli officers: "Are you in pain?" She raised whatever remained of her hands and answered: "No pain is like mine."



Prisoners of the Restrictive Status Housing Unit at Indiana State Prison Petition Seeking Redress for Constitutional Rights Violations

We the Prisoners in Restrictive Status Housing Unit (RSHU) here at Indiana State Prison (ISP) by indication of our signatures attached to this petition hereby collectively state that our constitutional rights are knowingly being violated by the staff and administration of this facility. Unable to secure any relief through a grievance process that has so thoroughly corrupted that it has become nothing more than a tool to cover up, deny and try to justify the abuses being committed against us, we have no other option but this petition to demonstrate to the world the deplorable inhumane unconstitutional conditions we are being held under.

Here are the following conditions we are seeking be addressed:

- 1) Unsanitary and unsafe physical living conditions;
- 2) The unauthorized assignment of prisoners to RSHU and denial of meaningful reviews of RSHU status; and
- 3) The systemic denial of due process in disciplinary proceedings

Unsanitary and Unsafe Physical Living Conditions

The Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) policies 02-01-111 "Administrative Restrictive Status Housing" and 02-04-102 "Disciplinary Restrictive Status Housing" mandate that the Administration provide prisoners held in RSHU with a "clean, safe, healthy, and secure environment". Here at ISP, due to gross negligence, the administration has failed to fulfill this obligation and as a result the following unsanitary and unsafe conditions exist in RSHU:

- 1) The failure of staff to conduct the mandatory thirty (30) minutes security checks that has allowed prisoners with mental health issues to harm themselves and given RSHU the highest rate of suicide then any other unit in the entire IDOC
- 2) A severe rodent infestation that has become so out of control that mice run in and out of cells and up and down the ranges all day and night
- 3) Due to birds living inside the unit bird feces. Has been allowed to accumulate on the ledges and vents. Once the bird feces has dried up harmful particles are released into the air that can cause serious lung infections due to prisoners and staff breathing them in
- 4) The walls and ceilings inside of the cells are deteriorating and due to the failure to clean them, many cell walls and ceilings are covered in dried up feces and built up filth. These crumbling walls and ceilings are exposing prisoners to old lead based paint placing our health at risk.

Prisoners have filed numerous grievances over these conditions that have only been dismissed and treated as isolated incidents by the facility Grievance Specialist/Executive Assistants: Maria Lessnee, Joshua Wallen, and Mark Newkiek. These three IDOC employees have turned the grievance process here at ISP into nothing more than a tool staff and the administration can reply on to conceal their misdeeds and abuses of prisoners. Please don't simply take our word on such a claim. All you have to do is conduct an audit of the grievance records where you will discover the truth for yourselves.

These unsanitary and unsafe conditions in RSHU here at ISP violate the cruel and unusual punishment clause of the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution

The Unauthorized Placement of Prisoners in ARSH and Denial of meaningful Reviews of ARSH Status

The IDOC policy 02-01-111 "Administrative Restrictive Status Housing" defines ARSH as:

An assignment designation pursuant to the administrative procedure for policy 01-04-101 "Adult Offender Classification" which separate a prisoner who poses a threat to life, self, staff, other prisoners, property of facility security.

Prisoners subject to placement in ARSH shall meet the specific criteria outlined in policy 02-01-11:

Assignment of a prisoner to ARSH shall be based upon the threat to self, others, property, the security and/or orderly operation of the facility, presented by the prisoner's continued presence in the general population

Standards for the placement of a prisoner in ARSH shall be in accordance with policy and administrative procedure 01-04-101 "Adult Offender Classification"

IDOC policy 01-04-101 "Adult Offender Classification" IV "Function and Processes" F "Classification Committee Process"

(2) The Prisoner is to be present throughout the hearing...

(3) Discuss with the prisoner the information on which the recommendation is based

(4) Allow the prisoner to challenge and present information

Here at ISP these policies and administrative procedures are being blatantly ignored and violated by the administration. Currently Unit Manager Pam Bain (the gate keeper) decides who is placed in ARSH and has devised a scheme that makes it possible for the administration to maintain "bodies" in the 333 cell RSHU so that the additional funding they receive for operating the largest segregation unit in the state continue to flow to them. Thanks to Unit Manager Bain, any prisoner found guilty of a rule violation and receives a disciplinary segregation sanction will be placed on ARSH status once this disciplinary segregation sanction is completed for an additional "segregation" period. These ARSH assignments are not based on any threat to life, self, staff, other prisoners, property or facility's security, but as an additional "punishment". IDOC policy and state law strictly forbid ARSH from being used for disciplinary purposes because prisoners are not afforded the due process rights to protect them from the arbitrary nature of ARSH placement, such as an appeal process. As a result of our ARSH we are kept locked in cells 23 hours a day, denied access to vocational and rehabilitative programs, or even allowed to purchase basic hygienic items such as lotion from commissary to treat dry skin, not because we are "threats" but because this administration has to meet a quote to keep the additional funds rolling in.

Unit Manager Bain's current scheme us a charade masking the use of ARSH for indefinite punishment for past conduct. Indiana Code 11-10-1-7 requires that every prisoner in ARSH be reviewed at least once every thirty (30) days to determine wether the reason for ARSH still exists. These reviews must be meaningful and based on current facts but here the thirty (30) day reviews we receive are frozen in time, rehashing old information used for the initial placement in ARSH as a pretext for our indefinite segregation.

The unauthorized placement of prisoners in ARSH and denial of meaningful reviews violate the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The Systemic Denial of Due Process in Disciplinary Proceedings IDOC policy 02-04-101 "Disciplinary Code for Adult Offenders" III "Definitions" "Due Process" list eight (8) specific due process rights that must be provided to prisoners in disciplinary proceedings:

(1) At least 24 hours written notice of the charged violation before a disciplinary proceeding

(2) The right to lay representation

(3) The right to confront your accuser

(4) The right to be present at the hearing

(5) The right to speak on your own behalf

(6) The opportunity to call witnesses and present documentary evidence

(7) The opportunity to have the disciplinary case heard before an impartial decision maker

(8) A written statement by the fact finder of the evidence relied on and the reasons for the disciplinary actions

The purpose of these due process rights is to provide prisoners a safe guard against the arbitrary vindictive abuse of the disciplinary proceedings by stand for retaliatory purposes. Unfortunately that is exactly what is being allowed to happen here at ISP as a result of the disciplinary officers obvious disdain for the prisoner population. These officers are Lt. Casereva and Ofr. Smith, who are responsible for conducting disciplinary hearings, and Sgt. Day and Ofr. Chambers, who are responsible for screening prisoners for conduct reports.

When a prisoner is screened for a conduct report it is Sgt. Day and Ofr. Chambers job to determine the plea, inquire into whether or not the prisoner wants to call any witnesses or present any evidence. If so, Sgt. Day and Ofc. Chambers must secure statements from these witnesses and collect the evidence so it can be presented at the hearing. Though they are supposed to carry out these duties impartially, Sgt. Day and Ofr. Chambers approach this task determined to discredit prisoners' witnesses and evidence, searching for and routinely manipulating the facts to favor their coworkers/friends responsible for issuing the conduct report.

Once the case reaches the disciplinary hearing Lt. Casereva

For more *prisoner advocacy & prison abolition*, check out:

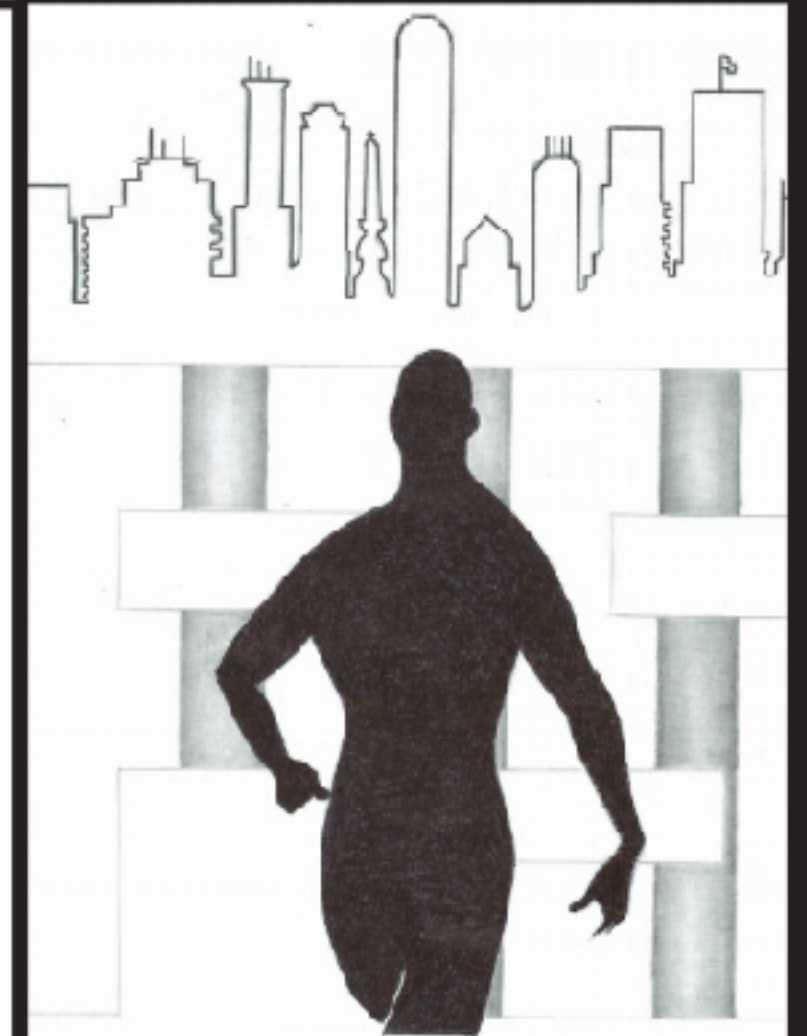
Green Star Families



Green Star Families of Indiana
on Facebook



KiteLineRadio.org



FocusReentry.com

Prison Legal Support Network

w/ **Indiana NLG**

IDOCWatch.org/prison-legal



SupportPrisonLives.org

NEW · AFRIKAN · LIBERATION · COLLECTIVE

FREE
THE
LAND

N.A.L.C

REBUILD
TO
WIN

BREAK THE CHAINS
OF OPPRESSION

NewAfrikanLiberation.org



BloomingtonABC.noblogs.org

and Ofr. Smith step in to continue this adult on prisoners' due process rights. They routinely refuse to weigh the evidence and consider the facts in their totality. Whatever version of the incident their coworkers/friends have written up is always given more credibility than any facts or evidence presented by prisoners even when these facts and evidence strongly support innocence. And though they are required to provide a rationale explanation for their decision, Lt. Casereva and Ofr. Smith hide behind vague language to justify their guilty findings. Such a process is far from impartial.

And the appeal process is simply a continuation of this arbitrary abuse of the disciplinary process. Warden Ron Neal the facility head is responsible for reviewing appeals of the disciplinary proceedings at the facility level. These reviews however are functionary and he never considers any of the identified due process errors presented in the appeal. Even when clearly present Warden Neal denies most appeals using the vague language "no due process error found" and this is repeated with the Appeal Review Officer.

These practices of ISP disciplinary officers, Warden Neal and appeal review officer violate the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Have prepared this petition knowing we risk the possibility of retaliation, we the prisoners in RSHU hope to find justice. We ask that an investigation be launched to look into the claims made here and if they are discovered to be true take the necessary steps to hold those responsible accountable and implement the required changes to resolve these unconstitutional conditions.

The following prisoners have volunteered to act as representatives fro point of contact in regards to the issues presented in this petition:



Lawsuit likely if ban on gender-affirming surgery for people in state prisons becomes law

*by Brandon Smith
from WFYI.org
March 2023*

surgery for people in prison becomes law.

The Eighth Amendment bans cruel and unusual punishment. And for the last several decades, denying care for a serious medical need is included in that.

The vast majority of major medical organizations support all types of gender-affirming care, including surgeries. But Indiana Deputy Attorney General Adrienne Pope said the AG believes denying such surgeries is legal – even if the U.S. Supreme Court has never weighed in.

“In the Seventh Circuit – our circuit – the question whether refusing to provide a prisoner with sex reassignment surgery violates the Eighth Amendment remains an open one,” Pope said.

Zach Stock, Indiana Public Defenders Council legal counsel, said the bill, HB 1569, ties the hands of the Department of Correction.

“Don’t require them to impose more punishment on our clients than the Constitution allows,” Stock said.

The Senate Corrections and Criminal Law Committee sent the bill to the full chamber Tuesday, along party lines.

There was a proposed amendment to the bill in committee that would require DOC to assign people to prison facilities based on their assigned sex at birth – essentially, forcing trans men into the women’s prison and trans women into men’s facilities.

That language was a separate bill, SB 487, which did not receive a hearing this session. Senate Corrections and Criminal Law Committee chair Sen. Aaron Freeman (R-Indianapolis) did not consider the amendment Tuesday and said the Republican caucus would decide whether it would be considered on the Senate floor.



It’s likely Indiana will be sued if a bill banni

TIME/CUT

PO Box 30253

Indianapolis, IN 46230

timecutindiana@riseup.net

**Chapters and associates in Indianapolis, South Bend,
Evansville, Bloomington, and Gary**