

**MOVING STRONGER:  
Needs of the Criminal Justice Reform Movement**

A DataCenter Report and National Survey of Grassroots  
Criminal Justice Organizing  
September 2001

By Grace Chang  
With assistance from Ryan Pintado-Vertner

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## **About the DataCenter**

The DataCenter is the oldest and largest progressive organization in the country dedicated to serving both the immediate and long-term research and information strategy needs of the multi-issue justice community. We conduct customized research and training for organizations across the country. Our information activists have expertise in community organizing, youth organizing, research, web technology, and library and information science. Each year, we help hundreds of organizers, media activists and public policy advocates nationwide make informed, strategic decisions and mount effective campaigns.

We fundraise in order to provide our services free of charge for groups that cannot afford to pay.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Moving Stronger: Needs of the Criminal Justice Reform Movement* presents the struggles, victories, strengths and challenges of grassroots groups organizing for criminal justice reform across the country. Drawn from a national survey and in-depth interviews with members and clients of these groups, the report offers the insights and analyses of long-time organizers and emerging leaders, in their own words.

The project aimed to assess the state of grassroots organizing around a broad spectrum of criminal justice reform issues, with the goal of bringing critical information to funders and grassroots groups about the diverse needs, organizing approaches and campaigns of groups around the country. The report will be distributed and used among grassroots groups to support networking, information and resource sharing, collaborative work and coalition building.

### METHODOLOGY:

We gathered initial data through a preliminary survey, sent to 226 organizations across the country, with a 24% response rate. We conducted comprehensive follow-up interviews with organizers and members by telephone and in person. The initial contacts were selected from the *Resource Directory for Educators and Activists on the Crisis in Prisons* (Prison Activist Resource Center, Oakland, Winter 2000), from among the DataCenter's network, and from referrals by criminal justice reform organizers inside and outside prisons.

**KEY FINDINGS:** Respondents identified key issues and concerns when asked, "What do you see as the movement's collective strengths, challenges and needs at this time?"

- ***Need for a Survey of this Type*** in order to identify and develop connections between groups doing similar work. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Do follow-up to this survey to provide ways to continue sharing expertise and resources, including coordination and support for a resource directory, conferences and coalition-building.
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- ***Ways to Address Divisions and Gaps*** along race, class, gender and sexuality lines, conflicts between offender categories, and the need for more participation by youth and former prisoners in the movement. ***Strategies*** currently utilized to address this issue include recruiting from within clientele, e.g. former prisoners who have received trainings and services as clients, or service providers.
- ***Ways to Negotiate Client Needs and Funding Demands*** such that groups do not have to cater to funders' tastes, can address client needs as first priority, and collaborate rather than compete with other groups for funding. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Include clients in decision-making about funding sources and uses. Fund coalitions formed around specific issues instead of individual organizations. Fund existing collaboratives rather than forcing new ones.
- ***Need to Deliver Effective Messages*** to counter dominant media messages and to keep pressure on legislators. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Use research of organizations already doing this work. Present available research in accessible language, through mainstream media, popular education and public education.
- ***Need for Leadership Development*** to sustain the movement across generations, allow leaders to do "visionary" work beyond struggling to survive, and develop leadership among youth and people of color. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Provide trainings for leadership development, funding for paid organizers to expand beyond volunteer basis, and support work of past activists to act as advisors and mentors. Provide political education to train youth of color in histories and current issues in organizing.
- ***Ways to Counter Hostile Environment and Repressive Mentalities*** present in the public and at play among some funders as well, and ways to contend with counter-organizing by conservative forces, including police and prison surveillance of activists and conservative nature of some funding sources. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Organizers have suggested seizing this as an "opportune"

moment to find unlikely allies, such as legislators motivated to consider reforms simply as ways to cut costs.

- ***Need for Legal Resources and Expanding the Focus beyond the US*** in order to counter the multi-million dollar, multinational prison industry. ***Respondents' Recommendation:*** Develop links with legal clinics, law schools and law firms and build relationships with organizations who have experience and capacity to work internationally.
- ***Need for Full-time Organizers***, especially in rural areas where operating or empty prisons are located and public sentiment is that prisons will bring economic recovery. ***Respondents' Recommendations:*** Provide funding for paid, full-time organizers to share work, cover more ground, and offer each other support. In addition, dedicate more resources to developing organizing tools, such as the videos, *A Prison in the Field* and Tracy Huling's *Yes in My Backyard*, both critical resources in campaigns against rural siting.
- ***Need for Campaign Models*** that are replicable, give people concrete things to mobilize around, and could provide a “school in organizing” on issues including building coalitions, different tactics, and working through conflicts around race, class, gender, sexuality, and generation. ***Respondents' Recommendations:*** Find and document effective campaigns addressing criminal justice reform to identify frameworks and strategies that may serve as reproducible models.

Several campaigns around the country were selected for in-depth interviews with organizers, members and impacted individuals to provide such models. Part II of the report, ***Profiles***, documents these struggles around transitional facilities, restorative justice, rural siting of prisons, juvenile facilities and inmate organizations. The profiles present the reflections of these movement leaders and builders in their own voices.

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## INTRODUCTION

In January 2001, under a contract with the Open Society Institute's Criminal Justice Initiative (OSI), the DataCenter, a national research organization based in Oakland, undertook a project to assess the state of grassroots organizing around criminal justice reform nationally. This included mailing more than 200 surveys, and interviewing members and clients of grassroots groups organizing around a wide variety of criminal justice issues. (See part III, "Survey Results" for full details of the survey.)

The purpose of the project was to assess the goals, mission, scope, organizing approach, successes and challenges of grassroots groups. The assessment was done in an effort to: 1) give OSI and criminal justice organizations substantive information about the diverse needs, organizing approaches and campaigns of groups around the country, 2) help the DataCenter understand the criminal justice reform field in order to better tailor our customized research and information services to it, and 3) provide a networking and information-sharing opportunity, helping to connect groups who have not been in touch, and supporting those who already are.

The method of data collection was through a preliminary survey and follow-up interviews by telephone and in-person with organizers and members. Over the past five months, we sent surveys to 226 organizations across the country, and had a 24% response rate. Initial contacts were selected from the Winter 2000 edition of the *Resource Directory For Educators and Activists on the Crisis in Prisons*, produced by the Prison Activist Resource Center in Oakland. We also used our own network, and referrals from criminal justice organizations. Organizations contacted included large non-profits, smaller projects, and groups inside prison walls.

We began with a working definition of grassroots organizing as that which "fundamentally involves engaging a constituency of people directly affected by a problem to exercise their power to solve that problem." Additionally, grassroots organizing: a) involves a membership in direct action on specific issues against defined targets, b) seeks to alter power relations and create new structures, and c) creates meaningful institutional change (from *Why Youth Organizing?*, YouthAction, Albuquerque, NM 1998).

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We also recognized that much of the organizing around criminal justice reform follows alternative models in response to the needs of specific constituencies. Organizing around women in prison, for example, may originate in a support group approach or service provision model because of the immediate needs of mothers, and later shift to include or emphasize a direct action model.

As such, the operative definitions of social change organizing used in the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation's funding criteria proved useful as well. MRG Foundation's criteria includes social service groups if: 1) they have service recipients involved as activists and leaders, and 2) they are clearly developing the organization's role in bringing the people served together to address problems. Linda Reimers of MRG Foundation elaborates: "We fund groups with a service orientation if service provision is to members as activists rather than individuals served by the agency, so that there is a conscious development of organizing members and building a constituency."

Thus, we included in this survey those organizations that may have evolved through these alternative models or that encompass a variety of models, with the goal of trying to understand the different kinds of movement-building that emerge from these distinct approaches.

This report is divided into three sections.

The first section reports some activists' responses to the central interview question: "What do you see as the movement's collective needs at this time?" The variety of responses reflect the inclusion of long-time and new activists, and their choices to either reflect on years of work in the evolving movement, or speak to the immediate struggles at hand.

The second section includes profiles of five approaches to criminal justice organizing from around the country.

The final section tallies selected survey responses, and suggests overall ways of understanding the aggregated data.

## *PART I*

### **What does the movement need?**

*Need for a Survey of this Type:* Jenni Gainsborough of the Sentencing Project said that she felt the movement needed just what this survey project is aimed at doing: that is, ways to identify and develop connections between groups doing similar work, beyond one-shot conferences but perhaps in coalitions. For example, she pointed to the Public Safety and Justice Coalition formed when Grassroots Leadership began organizing around the issue of privatization in general and found that prison privatization was an issue around which many groups were mobilizing. This need for building linkages and communication among groups working around similar issues was a common concern voiced by several of the participants at the OSI meeting after the Critical Resistance East conference as well.

*Technical Assistance and Organizational Development Needs:* A few organizations have undertaken needs assessments of this type and are moving towards coalition building in specific geographic regions. For example, Betsy Fairbanks of the Fund for Nonviolence reported on a gathering of California criminal justice reform organizations convened by FNV in December 2000. Fairbanks said that participating groups were most hungry for support in “organizational effectiveness,” noting that when given the option for either 1) sending members to a one-time training in organizational effectiveness or 2) an open-ended grant to individual organizations to utilize as they desired in the area of organizational effectiveness, participants opted for the trainings. The group convened in December identified the following as their greatest training needs:

- Major donor development
- Grantwriting
- Meeting facilitation
- Political analysis
- Racism/antiracism

- Financial planning, budget decision-making
- Conflict resolution
- Public speaking
- Empowering and coordinating volunteers
- Leadership development
- Technology, including web site design

Brigette Sarabi and Kathleen Pequeno of Western Prison Project, reported that WPP did a survey and mapping project of their region with similar goals to this project in 2000. In April 2000 they convened grassroots organizations working on these issues in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada and produced a report highlighting ideas for strengthening the movement in the western region.

Participants assessed needs of their organizations and identified several strategies to build the capacity of the criminal justice reform movement:

- 1) Establish a resource clearinghouse to provide information about regional groups to a larger audience, and information from national groups to regional grassroots groups
- 2) Set up database of organizations and make it available to each other
- 3) Set up media database and devise media outreach strategies for our issues
- 4) Provide on-site training and assistance by experienced people to build capacity of our grassroots groups
- 5) Convene an annual conference for grassroots groups to meet, share ideas and strategies
- 6) Provide up-to-date information on key issues, including family access, criminal justice initiatives, and set up a “justice watch” program

Also, participants identified technical assistance needs, listed here in order of demand:

- 1) research and data on criminal justice issues in the region
- 2) information packets on organizational development “how-tos”
- 3) web-based calendar for all participating organizations

- 4) convening future conferences
- 5) training in grassroots fundraising
- 6) recruiting and keeping volunteers
- 7) listserv for participating organizations
- 8) training in community organizing
- 9) training in message development
- 10) campaign planning
- 11) long range and strategic planning
- 12) building an effective board of directors

Sarabi and Pequeno raised a number of important questions and suggestions. They asked in what format—electronic, web-based, print—we would report our findings to make them accessible and useful to grassroots groups. In their survey a year ago, they heard many grassroots groups say that much of the current research is not available in accessible language and suggested that it was critical to do translation of research from “academese” to language that will be viable for rural populations, organizers and non-academics to use as organizing tools. They pointed out, for example, that the multi-issue groups they surveyed said they would be much more willing to take on CJ reform issues if we “made it easy” for them. Attendees at the OSI meetings after Critical Resistance East (CR East) in March of 2001 echoed this need.

*Follow-up to this Survey:* Sarabi and Pequeno also volunteered that they would be willing to coordinate follow-up of the products of this survey, such as a resource directory, conferences and coalition-building, in their region. This prompted us to solicit tentative commitments from other organizations to take on this role in other regions. Individuals from the following groups either already provide regional coordination to some degree or would be interested in undertaking this effort following the publication of the results of this project: Critical Resistance East and Prison Moratorium Project in the Northeast, Project South and Critical Resistance South in the Southeast; AFSC Arizona Area Program in the Southwest, and Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) which made some strides towards developing a Critical Resistance Midwest

after 1998 and plans to resume these. In addition, of course, there is California-based Critical Resistance as well as a number of formal coalitions or organizations that have long worked together in California around criminal justice reform. The Prison Activist Resource Center functions as a hub for many of these organizations statewide and nationwide, and maintains a vital virtual resource center at [www.prisonactivist.org](http://www.prisonactivist.org). It also publishes a print and on-line version of the *Resource Directory for Educators and Activists on the Crisis in Prisons*, an invaluable resource that should be sustained and expanded.

Some of these organizations have developed extensive curricula, trainings and media resources that can be shared with and reproduced by other organizations. For example, Joanne Archibald of CLAIM has produced a video and does trainings to help other organizations replicate some of their work in developing speakers' bureaus and producing a weekly cable access TV show. The trainings give women practice in public speaking, on camera, and dealing with questions from hostile people in the audience.

Another example is a program developed by Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, providing trainings in the re-entry program for former prisoners to learn to advocate for themselves to secure job training, housing and proper medical care.

***Divisions and Gaps in the Movement:*** Many respondents spoke to the need to address divisions in the movement around race, class, gender and sexuality lines, both as they have evolved internally and been externally driven. Dan Horowitz of Project South, for example, said that we need to address all of the ways in which the movement can be and has been divided along racial lines. He noted that in the south, there has always been a huge push by the Right to drive a wedge between groups of people of color, especially the African American and Latino communities. Horowitz says that one key to countering these maneuvers by the right is to take care in how we define the issues in the movement. Thus, he says, when we define the issues in terms of racial profiling and attacks on people of color, it lends itself to a more divided movement. When we define the issues instead as the Prison Industrial Complex as an instrument of social control, then the movement expands to be more inclusive, encompassing issues such as strike busting against prison guard unions, immigration detention, attacks on the

undocumented, etc. which have broader appeal to more people of color with something at stake in each of these dimensions. In short, Horowitz says, a broader definition of the central issues will lead to a more expansive and less divided movement.

Similarly, Donna Hamm of Middle Ground Prison Reform reports that one of the greatest challenges she sees is “bringing our constituency together to fight for common goals. We have minorities that hate each other and conflicts between offender categories such as sex offenders and others. It is a very difficult and diverse constituency to organize.”

A spokesperson from the California Coalition of Women Prisoners and Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, says that one of the movement’s greatest needs is more participation of former prisoners: This entails “the ability to hire paid organizers to do outreach to prisoners and former prisoners because the survival issues are so overwhelming for these populations. Also, there is a really critical lack of diversity in the movement, with very few people of color and even fewer former prisoners. We need to be able to train, recruit and pay organizers from these communities.”

Similarly, Jo Hirshman, from the Ella Baker Center, points out that the criminal justice reform movement largely neglects the issue of sexuality and queer communities’ needs. Thus, EBC’s project is mobilized by and for queer youth, serving as one of the few groups in the country to address the criminalization of queer youth explicitly.

***Outreach:*** Related to these divisions within and between the CJ reform and other social movements are differences between advocates and clients, and the problems this poses in outreach. Jen Weikert of Pennsylvania Prison Society, sees outreach to the clientele that PPS serves and advocates for as a primary challenge at this time. It has been difficult in the past collecting and maintaining data on people who have gone through the re-entry programs, since people tend to drop out of the program when they secure employment, become homeless, or re-incarcerated. PPS has just started an exit questionnaire that they give to out-going clients with a SASE. Also, most of PPS’s clients are men (75-80%). While women are incarcerated at a lower rate than men and thus may need this service to a lesser degree, there is a question of accessibility for women. Often women are immediately overwhelmed upon leaving prison by the

demands of resuming care of their children or of trying to get children back if they've been taken into state custody. Outreach poses a challenge for the program serving children of incarcerated parents, too, in terms of identifying children to participate in the program.

Denise Johnston, of the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, notes that her organization has been tackling these problems with a great degree of success. CCIP is staffed entirely by family members of prisoners or former prisoners, and Johnston shared some of the insights they have gained over her organization's eleven year evolution to this point. Johnston says that organizing former prisoners is extremely difficult because "people want to fade out, not associate with prisoners, and identify themselves instead as former addicts or in recovery." In response, CCIP's approach has been to "organize highly functional former prisoners," to find those who are willing to identify as former prisoners and are in a stable enough situation to participate in organizing also. Often, then, there is a self-selection process involved, as well as CCIP's efforts to recruit people who they have worked with before, i.e. participated in their trainings, received services as parents, or were service providers. Johnston comments that drawing from within the clientele served is a much more sustainable approach, "having gone the other route in the past, where people were attracted to a sexy idea, then withdrew when the action started."

Dana Anderson of Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) of Oregon offers yet another perspective on negotiating for their incarcerated family members from a difficult position as "advocates." CURE is a grassroots organization composed mainly of families and friends of incarcerated people. Anderson believes that perhaps as a result, they were long perceived as an "inmate organization" and thus excluded from policy-making processes with the Department of Corrections until a DOC employee helped them to craft a mission statement and create a new public image with the Department. Anderson says, "Then we succeeded in getting a liaison within the department at the policymaking level, so we have representation on the advisory committees that craft the rules pertaining to families, visitation and the public."

Now CURE members advise committees planning transitional programs "because we are the people to whom the released people come. The department understands that we are the major stake holders in making successful transitions for ex-

prisoners,” Anderson says. “One of our greatest accomplishments is having established some credibility with the department. One DOC staff member, the head of intake, said ‘we think of families as a resource and we have missed the boat before.’” Anderson observes “Although we represent the families and friends, we are the people who can work with the department in a non-adversarial role, and can help them a lot if we can find some common ground.” She cautions, however, “We walk a fine line. We don’t want to be co-opted by the department but don’t want to be back in the old position of not having any entrée or credibility with the department either.”

*Negotiating Client Needs and Funding Demands:* Denise Johnston of CCIP observes that “walking this fine line” or maintaining this delicate balance with correctional agencies ultimately makes balancing budgets more difficult. Johnston notes that her organization does not take any money from correctional agencies. Even in initiatives in which they will partner with an agency, they never receive payment for these activities. Johnston says they, like many organizations, need other funds to be able to maintain this policy.

Rachel Hersing of the Fortune Society argues that one of the greatest needs of any movement of community-based organizations is a viable way to operate outside of the demands of funders. She says “the life of a CBO is determined by whatever is popular with funders at the time.” For example, HIV education is one of the funders’ “flavors of the month” and while it is an important issue, Hersing says, it forces groups to take on issues and educate themselves quickly about new issues instead of building on work they are already doing. Hersing asserts that there needs to be a fundamental change in the ways that funders operate so that groups are not having to cater to funders’ “flavor of the month,” which leads to competition instead of collaboration among groups. She suggests, for example, that coalitions are funded around specific issues instead of individual organizations. Moreover, she says, “the people that we really work for, i.e. clients, should be more central to decisions about who we take money from and what for, so that our work is driven by the needs of our clients, not the tastes of funders.” Hersing articulated concerns expressed repeatedly and widely by many of the individuals interviewed.

*Support for Coalition-Building:* Abdi Soltani, of Californians for Justice, stated at the OSI meeting after the CR East conference that while grassroots groups want support for coalition building, this should not entail funding decisions that force artificial coalitions. Soltani suggests that instead funders “support us in our existing collaboratives that we have built ourselves.”

Caroline Isaacs of the AFSC Arizona Area program described one such coalition of groups fighting immigrant prisons, prison privatization, and the siting and construction of new prisons in Arizona. The coalition includes immigrant rights, environmental, anti-prison and other groups, such as Southwest Alliance to Resist Militarization (SWARM), AFSC, Derechos Humanos, Citizens for Border Solutions, the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, Tucson Green Party, Outmates, California Prison Moratorium Project, California Prison Focus, and others. The coalition organizes popular education such as teach-ins against prison siting or expansion, prisoners’ rights and support for prisoners’ families and friends. Isaacs says that one of the anti-prison movement’s greatest promises and challenges is making connections like this coalition.

“Since the strength of the PIC system is that it is so insidious at so many levels, we have to come together to use the same kinds of coordinated power and bring together various communities that are being criminalized and exploited through the PIC,” Isaacs says. Isaacs also suggested using the model of “continuum of care” developed out of HUD’s model, giving priority in funding decisions to collaborative work and to work that addresses needs identified within such collaboratives.

A similar network, the Immigrant and Prisoner Advocates Coalition, is forming in the San Francisco Bay Area by the initiative of Global Exchange to connect prison activist and immigrant rights groups including the Criminal Justice Consortium, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, Prison Activist Resource Center, Critical Resistance, Justice Now, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Northern California Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. The Coalition is emerging out of meetings gathering these key players in San Francisco, the first of which was held June 21, 2001, as well as joint actions such as a vigil protesting the 1996 immigration laws contributing

to the growth of immigrant detainees as one of the fastest growing prison populations. The vigil was coordinated between Global Exchange, Citizens and Immigrants for Equal Justice (in Texas), the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, INS Watch, SWARM, Center for Third World Organizing, La Raza Centro Legal, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service.

Dawn Frasier of Global Exchange comments on the initial stages of pulling the coalition together, “We had already worked with immigrants rights groups, so we had those links. We needed to reach out to prisoners’ rights groups and needed cross-education between the two movements in why they should support each other.” Frasier adds that they were able to build on “a good deal of awareness already” about the intersections of prisoner and immigrants rights issues, since so many groups “saw the need before we even took on the campaign.” She attributes this awareness to recent good media coverage in, for example, The Oregonian, The Village Voice and a Human Rights Watch Report on immigrant detainees: “That’s where the momentum came from—reports and people talking about it in the media.”

***Popular Education/ Political Public Education:*** Donna Hamm of Middle Ground Prison Reform says that “public education is the absolute key and access to mainstream media” is what is needed to accomplish that. Hamm says, “We need public service announcements like you see for anti-tobacco campaign or “Got Milk?” but with messages about “practicing compassionate conservatism.” Si Kahn of Grassroots Leadership, agreed that access to mainstream media was critical, even though his organization “has a great capacity in this regard already. We have daily news and radio capacity, but we don’t have significant access to TV or to print media other than daily newspapers. We need access to *Oprah*. These are extraordinary stories, but we won’t get an interview with *Newsweek*, *Salon*, or *People*, while people connected with high-powered public media can.”

Naneen Karraker of the Criminal Justice Consortium in California also emphasizes public education. She says that, in the area of sentencing reform in particular, “if we are trying to reduce the number of people locked up in cages, we have a massive task at hand, and while it would be good to have more people of color and

former prisoners in the work, that won't solve these problems." Karraker says that the movement needs "public education, public education, and more public education", largely to keep pressure on legislators, and points to the Justice Policy Institute and the Sentencing Project in Washington, D.C. as two organizations that are already doing this work well. As discussed earlier, however, several participants at the OSI meetings following the CR East conference suggested that available research needs to be presented in more accessible language if it is to be aimed at the public at large.

Kim Diehl of SONG (Southerners on New Ground) and Critical Resistance South, says that one of the biggest challenges in the southern movement to eliminate massive incarceration and the death penalty is the need to incorporate an analysis of globalization's role in the rise of the Right's use of incarceration to scapegoat new immigrants, people of color, and queer people. Diehl says that this dimension has either been under-emphasized or neglected, or it has been overemphasized in academic forums. She also calls for public education that is contextualized in the south, particularly since this region is "the stopping point and leverage point for global industries moving from the North."

***Leadership development and sustaining the movement across generations:***

Sandra Barnhill of Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers observes the need for more leadership development and support so that the strong leaders we already have can do "visionary" work, not just the work of struggling to survive. Michelle Foy of California Prison Focus suggests the concrete needs for trainings in leadership development and funding to expand beyond volunteer basis and have paid organizers more broadly in the movement.

Kim McGillicuddy of Youth Force says that there has been "lots of curriculum and training development—and many of us have written them up for the first time recently. But there is still a lack of resources to build long-lasting (50-100 year) institutions. Building institutions that sustain people requires a way to provide housing, education, and other infrastructure for our organizations. There's more we can do to build community around organizing – nurturing people culturally and socially, celebrating the work, etc. This is missing in the US, but not so much in other countries where activists

suffer under greater threats, like death. We need to strengthen the connection between past activists and us—so we appreciate their work, and connect them to us as advisors and mentors.”

Eric Tang of Committees Against Anti-Asian Violence also says that training, political education and leadership development among youth and people of color are some of the most critical needs: “Resources have to be dedicated to doing real political education and less money should be spent on technical assistance. Imagine using the time to teach people about what SNCC did instead of how to use the internet. We need enough time, space, and resources to adequately train the younger generation of organizers. There’s so much uneven political training in people who want to get involved with labor, youth, anti-racism issues. We need to give people a context in these issues—for youth trying to figure out where they can contribute to these struggles.” Tang envisions an opportunity to “get people together in a room for a weekend to talk about the different models of organizing, different trajectories, and to look at why the organizing world is white supremacist. A major question is why you can’t find more strong organizations led by people of color. Our allies in the Black and Latino communities just don’t have the resources to do what other groups can because the big foundations won’t fund them.”

***Hostile Environment and Repressive Mentality Cultivated by Conservative Forces:*** Denise Johnston of the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents suggests that perhaps the greatest challenges in the movement are “having to fight this trend towards repressive policies and the same mentality in society” and “the need for greater public understanding of the issues at root—so, for example, that most prisoners didn’t live with their children prior to incarceration, that the issue is not incarceration, but family changes are a function of what caused people to be imprisoned in the first place.”

Joanne Archibald of Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers or CLAIM, observes that these mentalities are at play among funders as well. She reported that a foundation, which had funded her organization for five years, stopped funding them precipitously, “even after we cleared our deficits. They said that several of the Board members were not comfortable with funding *that population.*”

Kim McGillicuddy of Youth Force also says that one of the biggest challenges in the movement is “counter-organizing by conservative forces, including police and prison surveillance of our members and the conservative nature of funding sources. There are so few resources to support activism in general; if you’re doing both activism and service provision, you are even less likely to get money for service provision. And because youth organizing has become faddish with funders, now the money goes to safe, less controversial groups, like Boys and Girls’ clubs, 4Hs, anti-smoking, not us, not the people who do race and class analysis and anti-oppression work.” McGillicuddy says that while the rhetoric has improved, the financial commitment has not (with some exceptions) and the larger trend is to fund more punitive-oriented projects, like drug prevention, teenage pregnancy prevention, etc.

*Seizing the moment:* Despite the indisputable hostile environment and public sentiments we are working against, a number of interviewees observe that this is perhaps an “opportune” time as well. Laura Sager of FAMM, for example, says “We see our work as picking up and expanding...New things are happening and new groups are getting involved because of the gigantic prison buildup.” Sager sees this as a critical time to find out “what kind of work is being done outside of the traditional CJ reform movement and why are they involved? How are we working with them?” She suggests that this is an opportunity to “bring in ‘unlikely allies’”. For example, we are partnering with a church for a conference on the impacts of Mandatory Minimums in communities of color. We’re reaching into some communities that we haven’t before, including taxpayer groups, women’s groups, etc. who may not have looked at the impacts on them before.”

Sager also suggests it will be important for CJ reform groups to look at “how state and federal budget issues and economic forces are helping or hurting their work. Are they able to take advantage of the fact that some states are cutting every budget except corrections?” Sager says that FAMM has been able to use this to their advantage, since “legislators are very motivated to look at reforms and re-examine the laws around low-level, non-violent drug offenders. This is because of [our] successful messages that these

are not the people who should be occupying prison beds, prison doesn't work, etc.—but also because the growth of corrections has become a problem for state budgets so that legislators are looking for ways to cut costs. They are beginning to realize that the bill [for prison buildup] is going to come due.”

Similarly, Brian Robinson of the Fortune Society says, “This is a decent time and political atmosphere to build a national movement in—there seems to be a slight backlash against [the PIC and police state]. Even conservative people are starting to hear that there is so much funding wasted in prisons, etc. It seems we may even actually get the Rockefeller drug laws rescinded. A lot more people are recognizing that there is something wrong, and we could build on this momentum, versus the ethic before, that crime was so horrendous that you couldn't even walk out on the street in New York. There's just a little more rational thought now, and a recognition that the system is seriously flawed.” Si Kahn of Grassroots Leadership agrees: “This is a good time to push these issues—mandatory minimums, drug laws, the death penalty, private prisons—because they are all somewhat teetering, or public opinion is swaying on these.”

*Legal Resources and Expanding the Focus beyond the United States:* Kahn also says that the need for legal resources is “absolutely a collective need of the movement because to an extraordinary extent, the fight around CJ issues is a legal fight—if you don't have those resources, you can't play, even if you are working from a grassroots basis and in direct action.” Kahn says that what we're doing is trying to take on a multimillion dollar, multinational industry and so we need capacities (whether internal or external, i.e. provided by allies) to operate in this scope. Thus, if Grassroots Leadership wants to take on legal issues surrounding for-profit prisons, it has to be done by developing links with legal clinics, law schools and law firms and they need to learn how to work internationally. Kahn says that one great need of Grassroots Leadership then will be building relationships with organizations who have experience and capacity to work internationally, such as Prison Reform International.

Ann Colloton, an investigator and public policy advocate/lobbyist at the Southern Center for Human Rights (SCHR) in Atlanta, was part of the legal team at SCHR that worked on the campaign to stop a private prison in Georgia with Si Khan. She worked in

a coalition of civil rights leaders, religious leaders, and others, including Project South, Georgians for Equal Justice, SEIU Local 1985, the state employees' union, and the Public Safety and Justice Campaign (PSJC). The legislative campaign started out with a bill to ban the importation of prisoners to Georgia and to ban speculative building of private prisons. The bill, says Colloton, was amended and watered down several times during the legislative session, and ultimately did not pass. "The legislative session started and there was supposed to have been a lobbyist who drafted the bill and obtained sponsors in the fall. But he didn't follow through on any of this. So when the first week in January came, we realized that no one had done anything yet, so we at SCHR drafted the legislation and SEIU put us in touch with a lobbyist for the AFL-CIO. He was our mentor throughout the session and he got us access to legislators as well." Colloton observes that "there are really no other lobbyists in Georgia with an agenda around CJ reform, private prisons, etc. So almost the full burden falls on SCHR staff who coordinate Georgians for Equal Justice. Now SCHR is taking on the issue of indigent defense, and this is a huge battle. It will be difficult to work on all of these things at the same time. So I agree that more legal and lobbying resources are needed in Georgia to work against private prisons and the many other criminal justice policy issues."

*Need for Full-time Organizers:* Colloton also suggests the need for more full-time organizers in the field, noting that last year's legislative campaign suffered greatly because they were supposed to hire an organizer full-time, but instead had someone only half-time, in the context of three private prisons operating in Georgia with two others that were already built but empty. Colloton explains, "So there is really a lot of ground to cover, and especially in rural areas, it's 'Yes in my back yard,' because people want jobs, etc. There was a lot of work to be done to build local bases, but because the bases were not built we got really slammed in things like the public hearings." Colloton was commenting both in hindsight and in anticipation of upcoming hearings on two possible private prison contracts: "This is an important time for us to mobilize local people to speak out—and not have the last experience repeat itself. A show of local opposition will really make an impact, although it's difficult when the prisons are already built. We should have started moving on this three years ago, before the prisons were even built."

And even if we lose the current battles, we need to keep mobilizing folks around the state now in order to stop any more future expansion of private prisons. We can't wait until they are built or the contracts are made. We need organizers who can stop them before they take hold in a community.”

Rose Braz of Critical Resistance emphasizes this need above all others: “What we need as a whole is *just more organizers*. We just hired two young women based in Delano to work on this campaign. We recruited them from the UFW and Rural Community Assistance Corporation. There’s nothing better for the political education of someone than to actually do the work. We need more resources dedicated towards grassroots organizing—we have enough reports and research, and it’s being done well by people. Now if we could hire 10 people doing the on-the-ground work.” Braz adds that we need resources to develop good organizing tools, also, like the video that was a critical piece of the campaign in Delano, *A Prison in the Field: False Progress in the Central Valley*. Braz says the video-maker who produced it completely donated all of his time and equipment. The value of video, Braz says, “is that it’s very transportable and can make an impact across the country,” even when you can’t transport people. It’s noteworthy that *A Prison in the Field* and Tracy Huling’s *Yes in My Backyard* were both critical resources in campaigns against rural siting.

Michele McNeil, a full-time organizer hired by Grassroots Leadership to mobilize local opposition to two local prisons is the only organizer for the two entire states of Florida and Georgia. She says, “It’s just hard to try to build a long-lasting grassroots movement in a place when you’re trying to keep things going in both states. The biggest challenge I’ve faced is the question of economics. People say, ‘What kind of economic development do you see for us?’ The way I deal with it is to try to get people to get past the quick fix, and some people do get it, but at the same time, you know, my neighbor just got laid off because his plant got closed and he needs to feed his family.” Beyond this, McNeil would like to have another trained organizer to share some of the work and have someone in the field “to bounce things off of and process, and have support at the end of the day or week—just have somebody to talk to. But because we just don’t have the resources for a lot of workers, we do what we can.” McNeil draws from her background as a labor organizer since 1986, “so the transition to community

organizing was not that hard—but in labor, you always had a big workforce, lots of people to bounce things off of. Nonprofits don't have deep pockets like labor does.”

***People not Money:*** Masai Eehosi of the AFSC Newark Criminal Justice program offers an interesting spin on McNeil's observations in this regard, although ultimately perhaps they are both saying the same thing. Eehosi says, “We always need money or funding, but people are our biggest and best resource. I don't think we're ever going to out-spend this system, but if people can make their voices heard and act as investigators, agitators, that is the greatest resource. It also lets us know what people need instead of our imposing our will on the people.” Thus, Eehosi sees “education to get people involved” as the greatest need for the movement, particularly in the current environment “where youth are conditioned not to get involved, or become political, because when they do and are identified as leaders, they get incarcerated and thrown into the ‘hole’ [control units].”

In a similar vein, Richie Perez of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights' Justice Committee, observes: “We've been for twenty years a volunteer organization. We don't take government, strings-attached, or corporation money. And this is a plus because people are giving thousands of their hours free. Of course we need infrastructure costs, money for having conferences, travel, and costs associated with building a movement and organization...But we need to train people to be leaders, to take on the rough task of taking on this work with very few resources.” Perez points to a campaign around the case of Anthony Baez, a police brutality case, as a good example of this kind of training: “We built a broad coalition, used lobbying, direct action, voter registration—a variety of tactics. The campaign was like a school in organizing and all sorts of issues—in how to work with gangs, with racial/ gender contradictions in the movement, etc. It was also a successful campaign that was multiracial and multi-generational.”

***Need for Campaign Models:*** Abdi Soltani of Californians for Justice says that we need such models or replicable PIC campaigns, just as we have past living wage campaigns, for example, to illustrate the conditions of low-wage workers, and how

organizing for a living wage makes a difference in the workers' lives. Soltani says that these would give people concrete things to mobilize around, and we should use this strategy around criminal justice issues, too. One interesting outcome of this survey, Soltani says, could be to identify some replicable campaign opportunities.

In that effort, we selected a few campaigns and CJ reform issues around which to conduct more in-depth interviews. We asked organizers, members and impacted individuals mobilizing across the country to reflect on their struggles around transitional facilities, restorative justice, rural siting of prisons, juvenile facilities and inmate organizations. The following profiles present these reflections, in the effort to identify frameworks and strategies that may serve as reproducible models.

## ***PART II***

### **Profiles**

#### **A Tale of Two Struggles for Transitional Facilities**

There is growing recognition that people leaving prison need transitional facilities and services. This has become one of the biggest challenges and top priorities of criminal justice reform activists.

Brian Robinson, director of development and communications at the Fortune Society, says that even system officials like parole officers are understanding this: “All of a sudden people are seeing that there are over 20,000 people being released into the city [NYC] alone from New York state prisons every year, and don’t have a place to go.”

Nationwide, there are 600,000 people coming out of prison each year and, as Robinson notes, “none of the reasons that most of these people went to jail for in the first place – like homelessness, drug abuse, etc. – have been solved.”

Yet, even as the public and practitioners are coming to understand this need, the challenges in securing or maintaining transitional facilities and services are significant. The following is an account of two struggles, one to secure a new facility to provide transitional housing and services, and one to maintain an existing facility. These histories are illuminating in our efforts to understand the challenges of advocating for these facilities and services, and to uncover successful strategies and tools that groups have employed in confronting these challenges.

#### *The Fortune Society’s Struggle for “The Castle”*

The Fortune Society’s battle for what has come to be known as the Castle, a building on West 140<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Drive in NYC, began with discussions in 1996 among board members, staff and clients to identify the agency’s key issues and challenges. From these discussions, a consensus emerged that the inability to find and keep housing was the primary impediment to ex-offenders getting back on their feet and not returning to jail.

The Fortune Society located the Castle, which had been a Catholic boarding school for girls until the 1950s, was taken over by the city afterwards, and housed a Jewish Yeshiva before becoming vacant for 25 years. Fortune Society bought the building in 1998, and began its plans to develop transitional housing, counseling, HIV education and services, and employment counseling at the site for released inmates. Staff envisioned clients living in the Castle as emergency housing for up to two weeks, and then going into transitional housing at the same site afterwards. (One floor of the building is dedicated to emergency housing and three floors to transitional housing with the capacity to house 60 ex-offenders in total.) The goal is to assist clients in becoming self-sufficient, with the idea that clients can stabilize enough to get permanent housing within a year.

Even though Fortune Society had the legal right to “do anything we wanted with [the Castle]”, they still made the effort to set up meetings with all of the relevant elected officials, including city council members, state senators, etc. to present the background of the agency and its plans for the building. In those initial meetings with public officials, they encountered no opposition. When news of the building’s purchase spread, however, opposition began to build among residents in the neighborhood. The agency’s executive director made presentations to the local community board and powerful tenants associations in Harlem and found that they were largely hostile to the facility plans.

Opposition arguments included:

- *The facility would bring drug activity and crime into the area.* Fortune Society responded with both formal research and simple observations that this activity was already present. They also emphasized that a transitional housing and services facility would monitor and prevent this activity, while responding to the needs of those already involved in the activity.
- *People turned away from the facility would cause problems in the surrounding community.* Fortune Society said that if someone is screened, but found to be inappropriate for the site or services, he/she would be referred to an appropriate site.
- *The facility would bring sexual predators and violent criminals into the neighborhood.* Fortune Society responded that the vast majority of their clients

are substance abusers, not violent crime offenders. In addition, the agency is consulting with two groups experienced in transitional housing, who are advising them on how to write a manual so that “we don’t have to start from scratch in formulating what types of stay are allowed, ground rules, etc. and how to maintain the site as drug-free and violence-free.”

In addition to countering these arguments, the agency used a number of strategies and factors to counter this hostility. According to Robinson, they were able to rely on “a solid reputation as experts in working with ex-offenders, since most of our staff are ex-offenders.” They emphasized this reputation to allay fears in the neighborhood that “we would build a shelter and then just leave,” leaving the neighborhood with an array of new problems presumably introduced by the shelter residents’ presence.

Fortune Society also pledged to be active in monitoring the site and immediately followed through by cleaning and transforming the building and lot. In addition, since many of the staff live in the neighborhood of the Castle, it was possible to assign two staff/community members to attend every single community meeting or event, whether police precinct meetings, street fairs, etc., to represent the Castle project.

“Now the neighborhood members are either supportive or quiet. We went about it to really endear us to the community. They realized that we were doing it, had the funding in place, and were going to go ahead—so they understood they had to work with us...It was important for them to see that we didn’t have to go to the community board with anything but we did, out of respect, out of good faith. And we had a good plan.”

In addition, Fortune Society proposed the space could be an asset to the community, offering use of the site’s computers by outside neighborhood residents and securing funding to renovate the structure as an historic landmark.

Clearly the Fortune Society developed an effective response to the opposition they faced from neighborhood residents, and succeeded in securing a site to meet community re-integration needs of prisoners. Other similar campaigns have not been as successful, but provide important lessons. One such struggle in Adams Morgan, a Washington, D.C. neighborhood, provides a good case study.

### *Halfway House in Adams Morgan*

The need for transitional services and especially housing in the form of “halfway houses” was already clear in Washington, D.C., before the legislation that exacerbated this need manifold. In 1997, Congress decided under the Self Government Improvement and Revitalization Act, the Department of Corrections for D.C. was to be shut down, and all of the sentenced felons in the district would go into the Federal Bureau of Prisons system by Dec. 31, 2001. In addition, all D.C. prisoners are required to go through a halfway house upon leaving prison. Ultimately, this created an estimated shortage of 500 halfway house beds in the district. While the city was undergoing a crisis in managing re-entry for ex-offenders, the district was experiencing a gentrification boom. It was in this context that the struggle over an existing halfway house in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of D.C. erupted.

Marie Sennett of D.C. Prisoners’ Legal Services and Jason Ziedenberg of the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) gave an account of this struggle from their perspectives as advocates for ex-offenders and as residents of that neighborhood. Both Sennett and Ziedenberg described the neighborhood as becoming “yuppified,” but also the home of many advocates and organizers in the business of criminal justice reform. Moreover, it has historically been home to many post-incarceration community-based housing facilities. Sennett noted that the facility was located in the neighborhood and used as a halfway house from 1969 until 2000, indicating its existence predated the gentrification of its surrounding area. It held sentenced adult felons until 1986 and then became a juvenile facility, still serving as a transitional site. Last year, while there were juvenile residents in the house, there was a fire in the building, and the neighbors acted to have it closed down.

The facility was evacuated of its young residents, and the Bureau of Rehabilitation, Inc. proposed the establishment of a twenty-five bed halfway house there. Once presented with the proposal, rhetoric against the presence of ex-offenders in the community heightened. Stories surrounding the facility became exaggerated and accounts rolled in of random gunshots, trespassing and burglaries--all presumably connected with the juvenile residents in the house--although a search of police records in the district showed no reports documenting these incidents.

In February 2001, announcements were posted around the nearby school by the local Advisory Neighborhood Council (ANC) for a meeting to “protect our students.” Anti-prison researchers and advocates who lived in the neighborhood also attended. “One of us lived on the very street that the proposed halfway house was on,” Sennett said.

Meeting organizers planned to break people into groups to organize opposition to the halfway house when Sennett stood up and said that not everyone in the room was opposed to it – in fact some of them supported it. Advocates asked halfway house opponents to justify their opposition to the halfway house in front of community media and the neighborhood’s City Councilman. Sennett and others then answered a number of questions about halfway houses for the larger group, providing a context for the community to understand that these facilities were proven to bring no public safety risk, and encouraging people to welcome ex-offenders back to the neighborhood.

Sennett emphasized that halfway houses are run by the Bureau of Prisons, and residents are required to find a job within two weeks after arriving at the facility or else they go back to jail. Counselors are on site to channel people to programs in drug rehabilitation, education, training, etc., and staff are present 24 hours a day. Those released must receive clearance from the U.S. Parole Commission, which has very stringent standards.

Ziedenisberg observed that the debate around the house “showed the limits of having the right arguments and the facts, because the tone quickly became very anti-prisoner and racialized,” with talk of pedophilia looming large. Sennett said the people from the neighborhood kept saying, “What about the children?” and pointed to the school nearby. Once Sennett pointed out that the house residents would be away working during school hours, opponents’ rhetoric shifted to fears about declining property values. Advocates later pointed out that even with former prisoners at the site for 30 years, the neighborhood’s property values had skyrocketed. People began to assume that Sennett worked for the BOP: “I had to explain that, no, I *sue* the BOP.”

Events after that meeting “underscore the challenges facing reform advocates in the context of organizing in gentrifying communities,” Ziedenisberg commented. “Even though the debate merely concerned a 25-bed facility, the opponents were able to secure meetings with the Mayor and the *Washington Post* editorial board.” The Washington

Post editorialized against the construction of the halfway house, calling on the U.S. Attorney General to intervene. The Attorney General toured the site, issued a press release saying he would block the halfway house, and directed the BOP to shelve the plans. According to Sennett, the building is now sitting defunct, and the Bureau of Rehabilitation is trying to figure out what to do with it.

In the wake of this disappointment, Marie Sennett proposes that the biggest collective need for moving criminal justice reform work forward is popular education to dispel the stereotypes so prevalent in public opinion and the media, and so pivotal in this campaign as well as so many other struggles. Sennett adds that the education “has to happen before there is an impending situation, like a halfway house being built in your neighborhood tomorrow.” Battles similar to this case in Adams Morgan have been fought and lost all around the country, often because of the prevailing rhetoric and media images that conservative forces have come to utilize so easily and effectively.

Ziedenisberg also suggests that this case demonstrates “the huge challenges facing activists working for broad or basic criminal justice reforms. The U.S. Attorney General and the fourth largest newspaper in the country were brought to bear against a local, 25-bed halfway house supported by some of the nation’s leading criminal justice reform advocates.” Moreover, Ziedenisberg says, opponents succeeded in drawing on these extraordinary resources, “with no data to back their claims. Meanwhile city leaders stood silent, even though they know the scope of the re-entry crisis. Now the city is short twenty five more beds on top of the 500 it was short before.” Finally, Ziedenisberg comments, the Adams Morgan struggle “may also reflect that in an era in which one-time residents have been incarcerated, others promoting the gentrification of these areas will oppose the return of ex-offenders to their former neighborhoods. The case highlights that activists can be outgunned by the forces of gentrification.”

### **Farms Not Jails: The Urban/Rural Coalition Against Prisons**

Denise Malloy is 53 years old, a farmer, nurse and leading member of the Organization of Concerned Citizens (OCC) of Wayne County, Pennsylvania, where her family has lived for three generations. Malloy describes herself as "never being

politically involved in anything" until the spring of 1999, when she first heard that a prison was being built in her township of Canaan. "What really alerted me," she says, "was that people were losing their homes around me."

A centuries-old dairy farm was going to be shut down, and seven families were being pressured to sell and vacate their homes and farms. So she went to a town meeting where she heard that plans were moving forward to build a maximum security penitentiary and low-security camp in Canaan. "We were told that you can't fight the government," Malloy says, "but we started getting people together to talk anyway."

Malloy says she did not become involved in this struggle because of NIMBYism: "It's not just that I don't want my beautiful rural community to change. I have personal outrage at the dehumanization of prisons, both for prisoners and for those who work there." Malloy explains that she came to her anti-prison stance in large part because she has worked as a psychiatric nurse in a state prison and a mental hospital, "so I understand how prisons work to incarcerate the mentally ill and I personally have experience with this epidemic of over-incarceration."

Malloy reports that it has been challenging to mobilize her rural neighbors in his struggle: "We're not used to responding to anything of a political nature. Nothing ever changes in this area. And there has been a tremendous respect for authority and reluctance to challenge it here. It's hard for people to see that authority elected by you can betray you."

Moreover, the struggle has turned neighbor against neighbor, husband against wife, and brother against sister, Malloy says. People fear losing their government-dependent jobs if they speak out and are constantly targets of intimidation: "Two to three years ago, there were people put among us to live here, who began to become friendly with local officials and to show up at every meeting. We call them the 'minders' but they're thugs. They say to us, 'we know where you live,'" Malloy says. "The business community, on the other hand, was courted very early and wined and dined at meetings held outside of the county—so they want this. Meanwhile, the rest of us were milking cows, cutting hay, not being told anything," Malloy says.

Thus, gathering people to attend weekly meetings and other public forums in the town has been a significant feat, according to Malloy. Although the OCC was first

greeted by public officials "humiliating or shooting us down," she says, "We've now gained a grudging respect. We're now more vilified than ignored, and that's an improvement."

Beyond this, the OCC succeeded in gaining a stop work order on the construction of the prison until the FBOP can address the damaging environmental impacts. This was the result of one OCC member's research on environmental protection laws and historic preservation laws applying to the site as protected agricultural land and as a registered historic site.

In addition, Malloy observes: "Our monthly meetings were really like a civic school to learn about all of this, to stall for about a year. We had some in-service teaching by the National Park Service and the National Preservation Trust...We just had to know where to reach to for this information – and all they could do is support us, because they couldn't go after the government themselves."

Throughout this process, OCC has found allies and the collaborative work has given birth to a new coalition, the Urban/Rural Coalition Against Prisons. Sandy Gambuti, Chair of the OCC, recalls that by a stroke of good fortune an OCC member happened to see Tracy Huling's documentary "Yes, In Our Backyard" on PBS: "She told us about it, we got in touch with Tracy to ask to see it, started a dialogue, and this is how the Urban/Rural Coalition was birthed."

Huling was pivotal in connecting OCC members with allies working against prisons in surrounding urban areas. Huling is quick to say, however, that OCC is "very much their own grassroots organization and were formed and active approximately two years prior to their involvement with us 'outsiders.'" They found some of us working nationally on these issues through the Internet and received some advice and information."

Huling invited them to a screening and discussion in NYC at the Open Society Institute in February, then invited them to be panelists at Critical Resistance East in NYC in March. Huling says that the Urban/Rural Coalition is "not an organization per se, but I jump started its formation by inviting folks to a meeting in April of 2001 in Manhattan to discuss whether people wanted to take some collective action toward combining forces to

work against prison expansion." A group of about 20 people at that first meeting decided to work with OCC in an action against the siting in Wayne County.

On June 21, 2001, OCC members and Coalition allies marched along historic Canaan Road, slated to be closed to the public for the prison construction, for a "last walk" in hay wagons, tractors and on foot, ending the march at an FBOP meeting at a local school. Both urban and rural Coalition members say that working on the march together was important for laying the foundation for future coalition work across the urban/rural divide. Huling notes that in most of the initial meetings, it was difficult "to get the city folks to go to the country." Malloy and Gambuti both express how important it was that the urban members came to meet with and support them out in their community.

One urban coalition member says he sees the urban members' role as supporting OCC's work, "not fighting the good fight for them," and the march on June 21 was a culmination of these efforts: "We made a strong effort to actually go to the community, and express the attitude that this was important." Urban members offered logistical support and moral support to OCC members who had not done rallies and demonstrations before, and had expressed that they didn't "know how to do it, how to talk to people, to get them to participate." They also helped them to think about how to strategize and organize people, connected them with the Justice Policy Institute (who did the media work for the coalition), the Research and Policy Reform Center, OSI and others. Sandi Gambuti, Chair of the OCC, says "The urban people were wonderful, and came out in support of us...They brought in their knowledge, helped us to anticipate what might happen, and then we were able to modify their suggestions for our context."

Huling says that the march "was a tremendous success on many levels. We were able to attract significant local and regional media attention to the prison battle raging in Wayne County, something that OCC by itself had had difficulty doing. We were able to introduce some new and effective arguments against the prison that had not been the subject of widespread community attention prior to June 21st," such as the potential destruction of families because prisoners would be moved from D.C. prisons to this rural prison six hours away.

Beyond the immediate event, Huling observes, "Most important in my view is that the interaction among people from incredibly diverse backgrounds, locations and political perspectives was supportive, patient, open, and ultimately transformative. The experiences for young urban people of color of witnessing first hand the oppression of poor white people and communities by the same forces that oppress poor urban communities of color, and of being in a role supporting the attempts of the white community to fight against these forces was, I believe, profound for them. Similarly, for the rural, white people to witness the urban youth of color in positions of responsibility and leadership in implementing an event which turned out so successfully for this community was also transformative. There had been great trepidation among the rural membership of OCC that the event would turn into a 'riot,' embarrass them and hurt, not help, their cause...One of the long-lasting effects of the success of this event may be that never again will people in that community feel so fearful about taking a visible stand on behalf of their concerns."

OCC has been in communication with a number of other neighboring communities that are threatened with prison construction in their towns. At home in Canaan, OCC is working to continue stalling the prison construction. Gambuti says, "I think we've won in any case. If nothing else, even if this prison goes through, we've still won because we've reached out to all these people and they've reached back."

Thoughts on next steps for the Coalition are perhaps less clear. Huling says the Urban/Rural Coalition as it stands now "is not an organization per se but rather a loose collection of individuals from rural and urban areas in several states who came together quickly to take collective action. I think the biggest immediate challenge facing the Coalition lies in answering the 'what next?' questions. The experience of planning and implementing the June 21st event taught participants a great deal about what is going to be required to carry out the Coalition's 'mission' successfully. The Coalition broke new ground in the area of organizing strategies against prison expansion with this June 21st project and it's important that we not 'whiz' by this event into a next event without articulating and integrating the lessons we have learned into a planning process in order to determine 'what's next.' "

When asked where OCC will go from here, Gambuti says confidently, "We want to remain as a community group, whether or not we succeed in opposing this prison. If the prison is built, we believe that there will be many social problems that we can help the township residents handle and ease this transition. We also want to be able to help other rural communities facing the same thing so they don't have to reinvent the wheel."

Members of OCC and the Urban/Coalition articulated their assessments of remaining challenges in the work that they have begun. Sandy Gambuti comments that while the June 21st event "finally got us into the local media and brought us out into the public...the coverage was still slanted. They made a statement on TV news [ABC and NBC affiliate channels] that all of the out-of-towners were paid to walk [in the march]." When Gambuti demanded that this statement be retracted, the TV stations refused on the basis that two people from OSI and Eric Lotke were being paid salaries to be there. Gambuti would like to see more and better local media coverage.

Denise Malloy says that the critical need is money to get out newsletters, fax alerts, etc., because "nobody in this fight is wealthy." She also noted that "none of the lawyers wanted to touch it, because they thought they'd never win, so we had to go out of the county to get a lawyer." Throughout the process, OCC members have all contributed, held small fundraisers, collected at meetings and "funded the work by nickels and dimes of our own money." In addition, OCC needs a place to meet regularly, since businesses and even churches have turned them away. Malloy says that the church built by her great grandfather would not let them use the space because they were afraid of the controversy.

Tracy Huling agrees that the greatest practical need for the Coalition to continue work is resources to support planning or implementing similar events. Huling says that the "last walk" on June 21 was facilitated by last-minute contributions from OSI, AFSC and some individuals for some of the hard costs of the event, but "individuals and the Coalition itself are now paying the price...financially and in other ways. OCC members are also exhausted."

Finally, one urban member says that one of the biggest challenges he sees is that "lots of people are jumping on the bandwagon, including local groups talking about preserving the constitution, or environmental groups concerned only about the rivers."

He says that they need to do “hard-core recruitment, to get people on board with our message instead of the NIMBY mentality.” He heard one woman say that instead of spoiling the beautiful land, “we should just put these criminals into some dungeon.”

### **Targeting Juvenile Halls:**

#### **Youth Organizing, Coalitions, and “Top-Down” Models**

Below are two accounts of campaigns against juvenile prison facilities that took very different organizing approaches. One, based in Oakland, California, was organized and led from the beginning primarily by youth organizations, most of them youth of color, some of whom had served time in the juvenile hall in question. The other, based in Baltimore, Maryland, was led primarily by a coalition of adult advocates, while youth played a mobilization role.

#### *Super Prison in Alameda County, California*

Every year, the California Board of Corrections gives multi-million dollar grants to expand or renovate prison facilities across the state. The decisions are made with little public input, especially from the people who typically fill the prison cells – youth, poor people and people of color.

But on May 17, 2001, the BOC’s decision-making routine was disrupted. The 12 board members – almost all of them white men working for police or corrections departments – watched as 70 teenagers, youth organizers and adult supporters entered the San Diego meeting raising placards and clenched fists. The surprise guests, as diverse as California’s population, had been organized by Youth Force Coalition (YFC), a coalition of more than 40 Bay Area youth organizations, mostly youth of color, fighting against “the Prison Industrial Complex, which we believe is related to a multitude of issues,” says organizer Rory Caygill, including inaccessible and irrelevant education, gentrification and criminalization of poor communities.

At the meeting, the board planned to consider prison expansion and renovation proposals from across the state recommended for funding. Among the proposals was a

request from Alameda County (which includes Oakland) for funding to replace its old, dilapidated juvenile hall with a new one nearly twice the original size. The new youth prison would be the largest per capita juvenile hall in the nation.

Youth Force Coalition, working with the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights' Books Not Bars campaign, opposed Alameda County's expansion plan, but did not oppose construction of a new facility. By all accounts, including the inmates, Alameda County needed a new, safer facility. But it did not need a larger facility, YFC argued, because youth crime rates were down, and the money would be better spent on programs to further reduce the juvenile incarceration rate.

At the local level, YFC did not convince the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to drop its expansion proposal voluntarily. So it took its battle to the state level, trying to undermine funding support at the BOC.

By the end of the meeting, the BOC had responded to YFC's testimony and protests by rejecting Alameda County's request for expansion funding, a decision that shocked almost everyone. As a rule, campaigns against prison construction or expansion in California – the incarceration capitol of the nation – are very difficult to win. Youth Force celebrated the BOC decision as “the first solid victory in California for what is clearly a growing youth-led movement against the prison industry nationwide.”

But the struggle continued. With a narrow 3-2 vote, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors pushed ahead with its plans for a larger facility. They planned to use \$139.1 million from a little known fund intended for capital improvement projects in the county. YFC and Books Not Bars studied the fund and built a broader coalition, including Vote Health, a group working for better public health, and Friends of Dublin, a community group from the city where the new facility was planned. Together, they argued that the facility should be smaller, and the money saved should be invested in the county health system.

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, defying still more odds, they won again. One supervisor changed her vote and supported a motion forcing the county to reduce the juvenile hall's size, emphasize detention alternatives, and invest the savings in a struggling county hospital.

These victories were one struggle in a long YFC effort to divert California resources away from incarceration, and toward prevention and education. YFC began in September 1998 after the historic Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex conference at the University of California-Berkeley. Its first campaign began the next year, taking aim at Proposition 21, a draconian youth crime ballot initiative that vastly expanded the state's capacity to harass, investigate, and arrest youth (especially youth of color via "gang" definitions), and made it easier to send children to adult prison. The initiative was spearheaded by former-Governor Pete Wilson.

In California, progressive campaigns against Right Wing ballot initiatives are very common, but also very difficult to win. Most election victories come down to money and campaign spending, not necessarily grassroots mobilization and outrage. Further, these grassroots campaigns often chose Pete Wilson or other Right Wing figures (e.g., Ward Connerly) as the targets, a tactic that some thought had lost its effectiveness by March 2000, when Prop 21 was on the ballot (and when Pete Wilson was no longer Governor).

So rather than targeting Wilson or his conservative machine, YFC chose to expose the corporate funding behind the initiative. The pro-Prop 21 campaign was funded almost entirely by major corporations like Pacific Gas & Electric Company and Chevron. YFC used the big corporate donors with headquarters in the Bay Area to highlight the injustices of youth criminalization and the election system, and also to show the connection between incarceration and corporate interests.

The strategy worked. YFC won concessions from PG&E and Chevron, built a stronger base, and earned a strong national reputation. These were all victories despite the perhaps inevitable passage of Prop 21. The victories helped make the Board of Corrections campaign possible a year later.

Rory Caygill, one of two YFC staff, said that despite the big victories, the organization has faced many challenges. One major challenge has been being a coalition of organizations. Coalitions are often hard to hold together, especially in an area like the Bay. Though connected by public transportation, there are nine counties in the Bay Area covering a broad geographic, economic and political area. As a result, YFC's member organizations often have different constituencies and territories, which can make even the

simplest things (picking meeting locations) tough. This breadth, Rory says, also makes unity more difficult.

It has been difficult getting solid investment and consistency from all the member organizations. “The Coalition is really staff driven,” she says. “A lot of the youth groups we work with are part of a larger group, and so the larger organization’s commitment isn’t necessarily to a youth coalition.”

Also, while having dedicated YFC staff is an advantage, it might also make it easier for people to deprioritize coalition work. “Since there’s staff, people can assume that if they don’t come through, stuff will get done anyway,” she said. To make coalition work easier, YFC changed meeting times, pays for public transportation to meetings, and provides free childcare at every meeting. It is also building a stronger steering committee structure based on level of participation in the coalition.

A major distinction between Youth Force Coalition and other coalitions is its intended longevity. Coalitions often come together for a single campaign or issue, and then dissolve when the campaign ends. YFC, however, intended to institutionalize itself. It continued to meet when Prop 21 passed, and worked with groups to develop a new joint campaign. Since then, it got 501(c)3 status under a fiscal sponsor (Youth Empowerment Center in Oakland), and has hired staff to keep the coalition together.

YFC has found that collective campaigns, like Prop 21 and the juvenile hall in Alameda County, help to build unity and encourage participation. They could increase their capacity to support collective campaigns by hiring a field organizer, and hiring organizers to support other local campaigns, such as an intensive effort to improve San Francisco’s alternative juvenile justice system.

#### *“Top-down, but it worked” in Maryland*

A different approach to a similar campaign happened in Baltimore, Maryland. The Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition, composed of parents, children’s advocates, mental health advocates, juvenile justice organizations, youth activists, clergy and citizens launched a campaign in February 2001 to close the Cheltenham Youth Facility.

MJJC proposed shutting down the facility over the period of one year and shifting funding to community and family-based rehabilitative and treatment programs.

Like Youth Force Coalition in Alameda County, activists condemned the Cheltenham Youth Facility as old, crowded, and unsafe for the youth. But they took their argument a step further, saying the facility was unnecessary and contributed to continued racial segregation in the state of Maryland. Cheltenham had been built in the late 1800's as the House of Reformation for Colored Boys to segregate Maryland's youth of color, and continued to house primarily African-American young men. The Coalition also argued that the youth in the facility were subject to neglect and abuse by staff and other residents, had inadequate rehabilitative, mental health or educational services, and were housed long distances from their families.

Jason Ziedenberg of the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) and a Coalition member describes the campaign to close down Cheltenham as a tremendous success, not only in the immediate victory, but in building criminal justice reform work in a number of ways. Ziedenberg says that it engaged several already-organized groups, including Maryland Advocates for Children and Youth, teachers' unions, and people at agencies who had been doing policy and advocacy in the area for years. He says, "It was totally top-down, but it worked and turned on people to criminal justice issues" who hadn't been involved from this angle previously.

For example, JPI partnered with Homes Not Jails, an organization previously focusing on homeless issues. Ziedenberg comments on the collaboration: "They are a direct action group and we're a service-based organization. We pulled together a rally to challenge the Department of Public Safety and it really shook them up."

Jennifer Kirby of Homes Not Jails describes HNJ's role as "getting people to create a presence at hearings and demonstrations like the one we did at the hearing to discuss reauthorization of funding for Cheltenham." Kirby says: "Our part in trying to close down Cheltenham has been to work with Baltimore high school youth who have been in Cheltenham or had family member in the prison system. They wrote a street theatre piece to talk about the system and what better alternatives would be. The play depicted two kids stopped by the police for dealing drugs, and the cop lets off the white kids and takes away the black kids. In our alternative scenario, the kids' lawyer talks

about how kids are left to rot and shows the damaging things at Cheltenham, depicting physical abuse and what would happen during a fire.” Kirby reports that during an actual fire drill, the guards had not been able to find the keys for all the kids’ rooms. Another group called Advokids, a mentoring program in a Baltimore high school providing counseling and peer mediation training did the artwork for the street theatre.

Ultimately, the Coalition’s work resulted in the Cheltenham facility being de-funded, and the introduction of legislation to fund CBOs for youth treatment, rehabilitation and education programs over the next two years instead. Beyond this, many of the individuals who joined the struggle through this campaign want to continue doing this work and expanding it as a focus within their organizations. Kirby says, “It was such a compelling campaign. Prior to this, we had not been involved in the jails issue,” despite her organization’s name. “In our messaging and our mission, we have a strong anti-prison message, but most of our work is focused on homeless issues. CJCJ [JPI’s parent organization] came to us and offered to fund an organizer to work on this campaign. We are all volunteer, and so they were able to tap into our mission and, in practicality, funding enabled us to agree to become involved in it by a consensus decision.”

According to Kirby, the offer from CJCJ came at a particularly fortuitous time for Homes Not Jails, as they had just taken over a house, were experiencing a lull in activity, and “one of our organizers was maxed out, so this enabled us to sustain our work for longer.” Moreover, Kirby observes forcefully, “What a lot of organizations get caught up in is having just a few policy folks writing testimony. When you have issues affecting youth and youth of color, until you involve those people, you won’t have much of an impact.”

### **Saving Inmates’ Programs in Oregon: Mobilizing Inside and Out**

An unusual, even unlikely, coalition of prison guards, inmate organizations, ex-prisoners, and grassroots prison reform groups in the state of Oregon has resulted in a major legislative victory that will make life a little more humane for those living and

working inside Oregon prisons, and has perhaps paved the way for similar coordinated efforts in the future.

When the DOC was faced with budget cuts of over 10% in the governor's proposed 2001-2003 budget, the department predictably slated several programs for prisoners to be eliminated. These included morning yard time, the only time for prisoners who work swing shift or graveyard to have outside or exercise time, and all inmate activities programs, including sports, youth outreach programs, inmate self-help programs such as HIV/AIDS Awareness, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Lifers Club and all cultural clubs.

In May 2001, the Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, succeeded in pressuring the state legislature to restore almost nine million dollars for the inmate programs. Representative Dan Doyle of Salem said that the testimony of former inmates, corrections officers and citizens groups, organized by the Coalition, were a major catalyst in the decision.

Prisoners at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) would have suffered the greatest from these cuts, since this facility had the most programs historically, while many of the state's newer prisons have never even allowed these programs to be created. Given this, one of the most important and novel features of the campaign was the active role of current inmates. The Chicano Culture Club in OSP coordinated other members of state penitentiary inmate groups to compile their mailing lists of outside allies and supporters, and the Coalition notified them for letter-writing through their Action Alert Network. Throughout the process, the Coalition contacted their board members on the inside who recommended former prisoners who could testify. "So even though they couldn't come out to testify," Sarabi says, "inmates were central to coordinating these contacts. They were critical to this campaign so that it was truly coordinated between the inside and outside."

The Chicano Culture Club helped run a program for youth that was nearly eliminated by the budget cuts. Reyes "Gypsy" Miranda, an inmate, talks about what led him to develop Los Hermanos Youth Crime Prevention and Education program after spending two and a half years on death row: "I was thinking, How did I get here?, and I looked at myself and said, That's not me, and why did society label me that way? I have

so much potential.” Miranda observes that “bills like Measure 11 are not going to change anything—that’s not about prison reform... What’s important to know and shouldn’t be lost is that the only way that we can bring about any real prison reform is through education, to let people in communities know what goes on and what can go on in prisons. This is how we can get back to reformation instead of punitive goals.”

Miranda says that people in the inmates’ clubs are trying to reach out to communities and “for lack of a better word, we sell a service—you talk about us needing to pay back a debt to society, and we can do that by passing on what we know.” Miranda sees it as a benefit to everyone involved: “Those who have been there and done that can teach others. For us on this side, we owe it to ourselves and our families to be the best that we can be and get the most from our experience. We have an obligation to ourselves to understand what it is that makes us a human being and what it is that takes us away from that. It allows us to choose what is of value to society and ourselves. Change comes from what you are doing--it comes from talking to people...There’s that expression, it takes a village to raise a child--you can’t take only half the village to raise a child, and ignore the rest of the village that is locked up.”

The youth program that Miranda developed with a number of other inmates eight years ago is “a first step to help people make choices, to hear what it’s like to be in prison, and above and beyond that that it is their choice whether to come here or not.” Miranda asks the young people he speaks to, “Why do you make certain choices—to be accepted, to feel important? Well there are other ways to get that need fulfilled. You don’t have to go out and be part of a gang...We’re not telling kids ‘Don’t do drugs.’ We’re saying that if you choose the same things we did you will have the same experiences and consequences we had.”

Linda Miller, a teacher at Molalla River Middle School, uses the Los Hermanos curriculum with young students in her classroom and attends panels and workshops presented by inmates. In school, she uses a book and nine videotapes written and produced by Miranda and co-creators, in which inmates talk about values, lifestyles and choices. Miranda says, “We talk about prison life, the true story, not anything like it’s portrayed on TV. We talk about gangs and children’s need to fit in and the choice to be part of a gang. We talk about victims, their families, and then the taxpayers who scream

that we need tougher laws—we show how their actions affect everyone in the community.” Other issues include alcohol and drug use, anger management, self-identity and culture, including “culture as how we do things in society and how we deal with crime--not just ethnic background.” Miranda says that the only way to educate kids is “to draw them out and let them see what’s in them and realize their own greatness.”

Linda Miller sits on the board of Los Hermanos. She reflects on the history of the project, and what she had to do before its inception: “I had been walking home one night with one gang, and another night with another gang because I didn’t want them to fight. Then , a group of inmates were seeing that their kids were making the same decisions they had made, but they couldn’t reach their kids for a variety of reasons, or the kids weren’t willing to listen to them.”

Miranda and others got together to design the program to do something more than the typical ones in which a parole officer brought kids into a prison for a day. Miller told the counselor at her school that she wanted to start having kids participate in this program, after she spent a full year attending panels and assessing it herself. Over the last eight years, she has expanded her school’s participation slowly but steadily: the district has provided a van for her to transport the kids to the panels inside the prisons, kids now stay in the program for a trimester at a time, and girls are now allowed to participate, after much resistance from parents.

Miller reports that now she has as many as ninety kids go through the program each year, with some staying for a twelve-week session, some repeating it, and some who go through one session, then work as facilitators for the next session. Some participants “just want to see what the program is about,” some have been coerced to take the program (so that they won’t be suspended from school, e.g.), and some are mandated by Court to participate.

Miller has advocated for and run this program for the last eight years as a volunteer, in addition to her regular teaching load. She says that the district has given the program “lots of support after the initial sell, but each time a new principal came in, I’d have to resell the program and convince them again to support it.” Moreover, she has to sell this program to administrators, teachers, and parents “who come in with these ideas that inmates are not people, who don’t understand that ‘there but for the grace of God go

I.' Some people actually think that inmates are using this program for recruiting! Recruiting for what? They also say they don't want conflicting kids' gangs in the same place at the same time." Miller says that there were perhaps two incidences of this kind of trouble, and they were handled immediately.

One of the biggest challenges Miller has faced in maintaining this program is that opponents or skeptics always "want statistics, and want them to be finite. They want 'one out of three kids graduated because of this program', and I always say that they need to come and hear these kids speak instead about how they avoided a gang or made a different choice as a result of the program."

The Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition also faced a major challenge in convincing the state that these and other programs were worth saving. Brigitte Sarabi of the Western Prison Project says that they pulled together the Coalition for grassroots groups around the state to collaborate in legislative action for criminal justice and prison reform. The coalition also included unofficial partners who are not grassroots but professional advocates like the ACLU, the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, and the Juvenile Rights Project.

The coalition focused on three issues to push in the legislature: 1) to reform the mandatory minimums laws, 2) to take away DOC's authority to ship prisoners out of state due to overcrowding, and 3) to fight the DOC budget cuts in healthcare and other programs inside prisons (\$9 million). Sarabi says that they had lost on the first, they had a "draw" on the second (i.e., DOC did lose their authority to ship prisoners out, but there was no ban on exportation to private prisons), and they were told they would never win on the third, but they did.

The doubters said that they were up against other more popular budget items, like Head Start, education, etc. Moreover, no one had expected that the prison guard union and this grassroots coalition could become viable allies. As Sarabi says, "Everyone expected the guard union to come out against it, but the DOC and the legislature were taken completely by surprise that there was this coordinated effort from the grassroots level and from former prisoners, and that we were able to work with the guard union. They didn't know where we came from, and all of a sudden they wanted to meet with us." After the battle was won, a representative from the guard union remarked to Sarabi,

“Brigette, you know that we didn’t agree on lots of stuff ,” but he and Sarabi celebrated that they were able to work together very effectively in that fight despite differences.

The Coalition utilized a number of strategies, including turning out people to show their numbers and testify at legislative hearings, coordinating a letter-writing campaign, and holding a community forum in Portland which drew about 140 people—a good showing for the region. On the first day of the hearings before the legislature, union officers gave testimony and, as Sarabi puts it, “They used both scare stuff, like ‘if you take these programs away, you’re endangering our lives’ and the humane line as well—‘prisoners need these programs.’” A local paper, *The Salem Statesman-Journal*, reported the testimony of Jim Moore, an officer at the state’s largest facility, the Snake River Correctional Institution: “We think inmates deserve a little more than the basics of food, water and shelter.”

Perhaps testimony raising concerns that the cuts would cause management and safety problems for the guards was more persuasive to legislators. Representative Doyle said they were concerned that the cuts would make it harder for officers to manage inmates, and some of the press surrounding the issue emphasized that many of the education and activity programs were started in the aftermath of the March 1968 riots that damaged the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem. One guard testified, “If they have nothing to look forward to, they will sit in their cells eight hours or more, just contemplating what they can do to make the system melt down.”

But Sarabi observes that the testimony of many Coalition members who are in recovery was also very compelling. Sarabi notes: “We had former prisoners who ‘made it’ who gave testimony, who talked about their experiences and said, ‘This is how I made it – these are the programs that made the difference,’ and their stories made some of the legislators cry.”

Finally, the Coalition hired a lobbyist who proved to be critical in the final stages, when the legislature told DOC that they had to find a way to restore the funds for the cut programs. Among four groups in the Coalition, they raised \$8,000 to hire a professional lobbyist who offered to work for very low fees. The Coalition’s lobbyist along with the union lobbyist went to the budget meetings to analyze the budget and identify other places where cuts could be made. These alternative cuts were accomplished in a number

of ways: two million dollars were saved by shutting down half of the intensive management units, which had long been criticized as unnecessary maximum security units for “difficult inmates.” Also, the union helped to identify several management positions to be cut, saving about half a million dollars. Other savings were made by reducing debt service for construction projects, phasing in hiring for a new facility, and using short-term financing instead of spending \$1.6 million from the general fund to remodel a women’s facility for 190 new minimum-security beds for men. (Peter Wong, “Money for inmate programs comes out of savings from reduced debt services,” *The Salem Statesmen Journal*, May 19, 2001) Sarabi commented on the importance of this victory for the Coalition and more broadly for criminal justice reform organizing in the region: “It was great for our coalition to see that if we all come together we could really do it and win . Tactically it was really good for us to be able to show the union that we could turn people out when we needed to.”

Sarabi explains that the coalition’s goal is to use Oregon as a “laboratory for testing out a statewide coalition doing ballot initiatives, grassroots lobbying (as the IRS defines it) and legislative advocacy,” with the hope of spreading the model across the region and country. Sarabi sees other opportunities in the region to begin testing the model as well, noting that half of the work that the ACLU does in Idaho is prison-related because there is so much abuse, but there are very few visible grassroots groups. So, Sarabi says, “We gathered them together in a room packed with a few prison guards, ACLU staff, former prisoners, and other community people and we saw the basis for an Idaho statewide coalition.”

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## **Restorative Justice: An Alternative Model, its Promises and Perils**

Barb Toews Shenk, Restorative Justice Program Manager at the Pennsylvania Prison Society (PPS), begins our discussion of restorative justice by asserting the need to define it. Conceptualizations of restorative justice, both as a principle and a practice, vary greatly in the field.

In a PPS newsletter, restorative justice is defined as “a form of justice that views crime as being fundamentally about a violation of people and relationship. Justice occurs when the harms and damages experienced by the victim, and others such as the community and family members, are repaired.” The model involves the participation of both victim and offender, on the principle that “the victim needs a forum in which to express the varying harms they have experienced as a result of the crime and to receive reparations. The offender needs to understand these damages and take responsibility for them.” (Pennsylvania Prison Society, *Correctional Forum*, Winter 2001)

PPS has created a new program area for restorative justice, including inmate initiatives such as the Day of Responsibility and a restorative justice workshop. The Day of Responsibility is a day-long seminar for offenders to look at issues of responsibility towards victims, their families and the community. The restorative justice workshop is a 20 hour seminar available to inmates to explore the philosophy of restorative justice and what it means to them. PPS also provides support services to inmates who have been approached for meetings with the victim in their crime.

Toews Shenk says, “The program activities are meant to provide both education on restorative justice and opportunities for meaningful accountability. While PPS offers services relating to mediation, they are looking to explore what it means to be accountable when mediation isn't an opportunity. One goal is to expand the knowledge and practice of prison-based restorative justice projects. An exciting challenge to this work is building the necessary relationships to victims and victim advocacy agencies.”

Arwen Bird of SAFES (Survivors Advocating for an Effective System) can speak directly to these questions, as her organization focuses on advocacy services for survivors, and for sentencing reform as it relates to survivors' needs and concerns. Bird says that she and her co-founders formed the group “out of the sense that there was not a

lot of support for survivors, who felt that when there was talk of doing things for crime victims, they were not talking about us.” Bird explains that crime victims’ rights models operate on the basis that the prosecutor chooses and defines who a victim is, “so it’s really the state’s right and the state uses victims to further its own agendas.” Bird reports that for many survivors who want counseling, treatment and restitution, they are completely at odds with or neglected by the state agenda. For example, Bird says, “It’s always assumed that the death penalty is healing for victims and that it is *justice*—as a survivor, I would say that that’s erroneous, that my healing does not come from someone else’s being sentenced to death.”

Thus, one of the priorities for SAFES is sentencing reform from the vantage point of survivors of crimes, specifically fighting the death penalty and mandatory minimums. Bird explains, “We try to provide advocacy for those who don’t fit into the traditional profile of a victim, for example a woman whose son was molesting her daughter, and when she tried to get him help, the mandatory minimum laws kicked in. She didn’t want to incarcerate him but wanted to get him counseling. Another example was a rape survivor whose attacker was not prosecuted, so she didn’t get treatment or other services. Or a woman who did not support the death penalty and argued on behalf of the man who murdered her husband. The prosecutor wanted to pursue an aggravated murder charge. The woman was ridiculed and unsupported as a victim, because she did not support the level of vengeance and punishment that the state was pursuing.”

Bird describes the typical so-called “crime victims’ rights” models that SAFES has tried to counter, working to develop alternative models that genuinely respond to the needs of crime survivors. She points to Crime Victims United as an example of the prevailing model, an organization long dominating this area of criminal justice policy in Oregon. Bird says, “They have used their power to reinforce the state and put in mandatory minimums and other repressive, vengeful punishment policies. We have effected a shift away from this mentality based on vengeance and punishment towards an effective crime policy that is not glamorous but based on research and the principles of

restorative justice.” SAFES gravitates towards the restorative justice model because, as Bird puts it, “for us, it acknowledges that a crime and the result of the crime is not just about the offender. There is a survivor and a community. This model is about restoring and healing the offender, the survivor and the community.”

How does the model work in practice? Bird offered one example of a SAFES member whose daughter was killed in a car crash and the driver was a woman who was intoxicated and/or under the influence of drugs. The father read in the police report that this woman had children, whom he felt “needed her more than the criminal justice system needed her in prison.” He started victim-offender mediation with the woman while she was serving her sentence so that she was able to go into treatment while she was in prison. After the woman came out of prison, they continued to be in contact for a while and “tried to help her be there for her children.” Bird reports that eventually the woman relapsed and cut off contact, but the father still saw it as a valuable process because “it’s not about hate but helping this woman acknowledge the life that she took and helping to restore her in the process.”

Tina Beads, Faye Blaney, Janelle White and other participants in discussions led by the new, national organization, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, might agree with Bird, although they would argue the need for multiple alternative visions and voices informing criminal justice reform, and particularly restorative justice. INCITE! ran an institute in New Orleans in March of 2001 to develop alternatives to incarceration for violence against women of color. White explains, “A core group of us who planned these institutes came together at the UC Santa Cruz Color of Violence conference to talk about developing community-based solutions to addressing violence.” White says frankly, “We’re talking about it, but we are having trouble identifying actual models out of the community.” More specifically, participants in the discussions held as a core principle that the response of turning to the state as a “solution” for violence against women of color was highly problematic. Thus, White says, “We couldn’t identify clearly any specific models to address violence that did not rely on the state.”

White observes the damaging effects of having to accommodate or cooperate with the state in her experience in anti-violence work: “Organizations dealing with sexual violence and domestic violence have been so shaped and coopted by the state that we

have to stop looking there and create our own models that don't rely on the criminal justice system. We have become so much a part of that system by accepting state funding as, for example, rape crisis centers... and fighting each other for scarce resources. The state sets it up this way. I was applying for money from the Department of Justice and [the grant structure] effectively pitted sexual assault against domestic violence. That is completely antithetical to community organizing." White believes that anti-violence activists "have had to try so hard to convince the state that these issues are important" that they have begun to lose sight of their own concerns and agenda and shape their language to appeal to the state funding powers.

Some critics view the restorative justice model as perhaps one of the best illustrations of state manipulation and co-optation of anti-violence and criminal justice reform efforts. Two scholar/activists in Vancouver, B.C., Tina Beads and Faye Blaney, have been interviewing indigenous women about their experiences with and perspectives on restorative justice. Their interviewees expressed overwhelmingly that these programs have not been an effective way to address violence against women and children, but instead that the survivor often feels re-victimized by this "solution." Moreover, the state in Canada has adopted rhetoric insisting that restorative justice is a traditional cultural principle of aboriginal people in British Columbia. Blaney and Beads' research does not support this claim, and asserts instead that restorative justice is not an acceptable way to deal with domestic violence and sexual assault from any perspective except the state's.

Tina Beads of the Vancouver Rape Relief Collective and women's shelter and the Aboriginal Women's Action Network says that she and Blaney interviewed women from six different Aboriginal populations in BC for their perspectives and found that the restorative justice model being advanced by the state was neither embraced by the Aboriginal women nor seen as rooted in Aboriginal culture, as the state contends. Beads says, "Restorative justice, as defined by our criminal justice system, is a theory or philosophy which involves reuniting the victim and offender and resolving the problem this way. We do support this model for some crimes, certainly those involving groups or institutions, but not individuals in violent crimes such as violent sexual assault." Beads adds that in theory the restorative justice model could serve as a means of reducing the incarceration rates of aboriginal people, but it remains to be seen if the model will impact

the devastating numbers: 25% of incarcerated people in the nation are Aboriginal while only 4% of the population as whole are Aboriginal in descent. Moreover, the model as it has been advanced in Vancouver is highly problematic for the communities it is supposed to serve, and from which it allegedly emerged.

Beads recounts the history of how the model was instituted in Vancouver: “What was happening in the city was that there was a new restorative justice program being developed *for* the aboriginal population, and they invited aboriginal individuals to sit on the steering committee—mainly men and men offenders. There was one woman sitting on the committee who was alarmed at this and contacted other members of anti-violence groups to join those meetings. They weren’t considering gender inequality and what the response would be to violence against women. They weren’t prepared to talk about it. We decided that we needed to have strong knowledge of the policies and laws that affect women, so we held 16 workshops to teach ourselves and aboriginal women in the region about child and elder abuse , sexual assault, etc. We came up with the analysis that restorative justice doesn’t work in cases of sexual assault and child abuse and that we were opposed to it.” In addition, prior to this the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), publicly issued an opinion saying they were opposed to restorative justice in cases of violence against women, along with 700 member centers. (See the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centers [www.casac.ca](http://www.casac.ca) document.)

The interviews with members and staff of Pennsylvania Prison Society, SAFES and INCITE! provide some important questions and perspectives to help in evaluating restorative justice models. Moreover, they highlight that any criminal justice reform models we entertain are susceptible to being co-opted and ultimately distorted by the state only to commit violence against women, people of color and those who are already survivors of violence again. Furthermore, the jury is still out on whether or not restorative justice measures actually serve to reduce incarceration of members of these communities.

What emerges from these discussions is that individuals working from several different positions in the movement, with quite different perspectives on the operative model of restorative justice, share a core principle of finding viable alternatives to the state machinery and to public mentalities based on hate, vengeance, racism, misogyny

and other forms of state-supported violence. These individuals and groups from many different corners of the movement remain committed to developing new models of justice that don't reinforce the state's powers to abuse, and don't reinscribe the public's tendency to think and act in ways that are only violent and destructive to communities in the end.

## ***PART III***

# **Survey Results**

### **Observations on Survey Responses**

#### *About the Survey*

Over the past five months, we sent surveys to 226 organizations across the country organizing for criminal justice reform. We had a 24% response rate. Some of these organizations were also interviewed, and their thoughts comprise the second narrative section of this report.

The organizations were identified using a variety of means, including the directory of the Prison Activist Resource Center (to whom we are deeply indebted), our own network, and referrals from criminal justice organizations. They included large non-profits, smaller projects, and groups inside prison walls.

Though we reached a large portion of the criminal justice reform community, we were *not* comprehensive. Various factors impacted our reach. Many small organizations do not have consistent access to telephone, fax and email communication, especially in rural areas and prisons. Others do not have up-to-date contact information in the PARC directory. We also suspect there are many organizations that we simply never learned about using our various and limited research methods, or we learned about them too late to include their information in this report. Finally, many organizations doing criminal justice reform organizing do not self-identify as “criminal justice” organizations, because they are multi-issue, choosing campaigns based on the needs of their members. As a result, they are not fully represented in our report, though their work plays a crucial role in the movement against the prison industrial complex.

In conducting our survey, we did not use a strict, traditional definition of organizing that requires organizations to be membership-led, engaged in direct actions, and working on formal campaigns. (See Introduction.) As a result, our sense of “the field” includes equally a small, one-volunteer project in Utah and a large, \$3,000,000 non-profit in California. Being comprehensive, by our standard, would have required

communicating with each group across this spectrum, which is daunting, especially given our resources and time to complete the project.

### *Geographic Areas*

Recognizing our potential bias as a California-based organization, and the general perception that California is the focal point of criminal justice reform struggle, we worked hard to illumine work in the rest of the country. We spent the first few months of the project looking exclusively outside the state.

Still, California came out as the strongest individual state in our survey, while other states, when aggregated as regions like the Northwest and Southeast, are also strong, thanks to the work of regional networks like the Western Prison Project in the Northwest.

### *The Issues*

Organizations are tackling a startling array of issues. Our survey listed 23 issues to choose from, relying in part on categories already created by the Prison Activist Resource Center, ranging from parole reform to political prisoners. Almost every organization checked more than one of these, and many of them argued that the issues are so interrelated that choosing even a handful was difficult.

Activity peaked around several issues: criminalization of people of color, sentencing reform, prisoners' rights and human rights abuses inside prisons, and women prisoners. The least amount of groups chose: immigration enforcement abuses, prison labor, incarceration of women who kill their batterers, zero tolerance policies, and felony disenfranchisement.

### *The Organizations*

Nearly half of the organizations reported having independent 501(c)3 status, while another quarter were sponsored by another non-profit. The overwhelming majority of organizations were relatively small with one to five staff overall, and one to five staff working specifically on criminal justice organizing.

Overall organizational budgets clustered around the following ranges: \$0 - \$15,000; \$36,000 - \$65,000; \$100,000 - \$499,000; and the smallest cluster of eight between \$700,000 and \$900,000+.

Budgets dedicated to criminal justice organizing were significantly smaller, clustering around these ranges: \$0 - \$15,000; \$65,000 - \$299,000; and only two above \$800,000.

The criminal justice projects ranged in age from less than one year to 40 years old. The vast majority of projects were founded in the 1990s.

### *Limitations on Measuring Capacity*

We attempted to measure organizing capacity by asking groups to report membership size or mobilization capacity. Nearly half of the groups reported membership or mobilization capacity of over 100 people. But the second most frequent response was in fact “No Response”. The same proved true for our survey question about staff size dedicated to criminal justice reform organizing.

This left us wondering how to interpret the responses, and we came up with several possibilities:

1. For a variety of reasons, groups simply skipped the questions (i.e., poorly worded question, not enough time to answer, etc.).
2. By using a broad definition of organizing, we included groups that actually engage in no organizing at all, regardless of how broadly organizing is defined.
3. Organizations engaged in non-traditional organizing, which is hard to measure in numbers, could not answer the questions, or assumed that it referred to traditional organizing, and skipped them.

We think this needs further exploration. Anecdotally, we found that the organizing field is very diverse, in part because prisons, jails and police impact our lives at so many different levels: economic, psychological, familial, physiological, geographical. We also found that there are relatively few organizations focused on building strong memberships, which is traditionally considered the way to build power in a community. Stronger statistical data on organizing approaches and deeper investigation of these issues would help us better understand, fund, support and celebrate the field.

## Survey Responses

Tallied July 12, 2001

### Number of survey responses by state:

|                |    |
|----------------|----|
| Arizona        | 4  |
| California     | 20 |
| Florida        | 1  |
| Georgia        | 2  |
| Illinois       | 2  |
| Maryland       | 1  |
| Massachusetts  | 2  |
| Michigan       | 1  |
| Minnesota      | 1  |
| Montana        | 1  |
| New Jersey     | 1  |
| New Mexico     | 1  |
| New York       | 4  |
| North Carolina | 1  |
| Ohio           | 3  |
| Oregon         | 4  |
| Pennsylvania   | 1  |
| South Carolina | 1  |
| Utah           | 1  |
| Wash., DC      | 1  |
| Washington     | 2  |

**TOTAL 55**

### Central Issue(s) your organization focuses on:

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 16 | criminalization of people of color  |
| 9  | criminalization of youth  |
| 12 | police brutality  |
| 3  | immigration enforcement abuses  |
| 4  | incarceration of immigrants   |
| 4  | drug enforcement  |
| 17 | sentencing reform   |
| 13 | prison expansion (including environmental racism)   |
| 6  | prison privatization  |
| 10 | reduction of social welfare spending and diversion of public resources to growth of the prison industrial complex |
| 2  | prison labor  |
| 21 | prisoners' rights and human rights abuses inside prisons  |
| 18 | women prisoners   |

- 5 sexual abuse in prisons
- 2 incarceration of women who kill their batterers
- 10 prisoners' family rights
- 10 death penalty abolition
- 6 parole reform
- 9 political prisoners
- 10 re-entry of ex-convicts to the community
- 3 zero tolerance policies
- 3 felony disenfranchisement
- 4 voting rights and civic participation
- 22 other/details

**501(c)status: (independent/sponsor/none):**

- 26 independent
- 13 sponsor
- 7 none
- 7 No Response

**Staff size overall:**

- 4 no staff/ all volunteer
- 22 1-5
- 9 6-10
- 4 11-15
- 0 16-20
- 8 above 20
- 5 No Response

**Staff size dedicated to Criminal Justice Reform organizing**

- 2 no staff/ all volunteer
- 26 1-5
- 5 6-10
- 3 11-15
- 1 16-20
- 1 above 20
- 14 No Response

**Budget overall**

|   |             |   |               |   |    |
|---|-------------|---|---------------|---|----|
| 5 | none        | 0 | \$65-99,000   | 9 | NR |
| 2 | \$1-5000    | 4 | \$100-199,000 |   |    |
| 4 | \$6-10,000  | 7 | \$200-299,000 |   |    |
| 3 | \$11-15,000 | 1 | \$300-399,000 |   |    |
| 0 | \$16-20,000 | 3 | \$400-499,000 |   |    |
| 0 | \$21-25,000 | 0 | \$500-599,000 |   |    |
| 0 | \$26-35,000 | 0 | \$600-699,000 |   |    |
| 3 | \$36-45,000 | 1 | \$700-799,000 |   |    |
| 3 | \$46-55,000 | 1 | \$800-899,000 |   |    |
| 1 | \$56-65,000 | 6 | \$900,000 +   |   |    |

**Budget dedicated to Criminal Justice Reform organizing**

|   |             |   |               |    |           |
|---|-------------|---|---------------|----|-----------|
| 3 | none        | 2 | \$65-99,000   | 16 | NR        |
| 2 | \$1-5000    | 8 | \$100-199,000 | 15 | 100%      |
| 1 | \$6-10,000  | 1 | \$200-299,000 | 1  | 50%       |
| 1 | \$11-15,000 | 0 | \$300-399,000 | 1  | “postage” |
| 0 | \$16-20,000 | 0 | \$400-499,000 |    |           |
| 0 | \$21-25,000 | 0 | \$500-599,000 |    |           |
| 1 | \$26-35,000 | 0 | \$600-699,000 |    |           |
| 0 | \$36-45,000 | 0 | \$700-799,000 |    |           |
| 1 | \$46-55,000 | 1 | \$800-899,000 |    |           |
| 0 | \$56-65,000 | 1 | \$900,000 +   |    |           |

**Age of Criminal Justice Reform project**

|    |               |
|----|---------------|
| 1  | under 1 year  |
| 6  | 1-3 years     |
| 13 | 4-6 years     |
| 5  | 7-9 years     |
| 4  | 10-12 years   |
| 3  | 13-15 years   |
| 0  | 16-20 years   |
| 3  | 21-25 years   |
| 1  | 26-30 years   |
| 1  | 31-35 years   |
| 1  | 36-40 years   |
| 0  | 41-45 years   |
| 0  | 46-50 years   |
| 0  | over 50 years |
| 14 | No Response   |
| 1  | “new”         |

**Membership size/Mobilization Capacity**

|    |             |
|----|-------------|
| 4  | 1-25        |
| 3  | 26-50       |
| 1  | 51-75       |
| 2  | 76-100      |
| 24 | over 100    |
| 16 | No Response |