

# PERCEPTIONS REIMAGINED

## MOVING AHEAD IN 2024

WINTER

2024

# VOLUME TWO

## ISSUE ONE

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Still In Our Thoughts*
- *I Could Do This, I Could Conquer Anything*
- *Thank You To Our Servicemen*
- *Practicing Mindfulness*
- *Mental Health News*
- *What Unites Us All*
- *Informative Reform*

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Welcome to the second issue of the EMCF newsletter, called, "Perceptions Reimagined," an idea conceived by Assistant Commissioner Tomé, a newsletter by the women of EMCF, for the women of EMCF. Her vision was to document and capture the history of EMCF as it develops into a different institution that is trauma-informed.

We, the editors, are charged to present diversity and inclusivity as a demonstration of collaborative efforts of the exceptional talents within EMCF. This issue is focused on the theme of "Perspectives" by the women of EMCF and how confinement has affected them. In this issue personal thoughts are shared about lengthy sentences, separation from family, grief and loss, wrongful convictions, and injustices faced by women in the criminal justice system. The contributors have shared their artistic talents, creation of puzzles, and poetry. They shared per-

sonal experiences and observations of the effects of confinement with the poignant usage of language and imagery to assist readers to understand the real life experiences of incarcerated women.

The most impactful part of this issue is how contributors have shared personal experiences to provide useful insights to the effects of mandatory minimum sentencing. More importantly, how lengthy sentences destroy not only the female offender, but their families as well. It is safe to say that society and communities large and small have little knowledge of or about a justice impacted woman.

After reading this issue, the hope is a promotion of new perspectives of how women can be viewed when justice impacted. Perhaps those in the free world will realize that there is a need for rehabilitative services and alternative ways to ameliorate the effects of the 85% parole disqualifier, No Early Release Act. Perhaps lawmakers, judges and

prosecutors may come to realize that the punishments they impose are impactful and have long term effects on the offender and their families.

Most importantly, the victims and their families are in the forefront of most female offender's minds. The days that turn into months, years into decades. After serving a decade, the time is not void of regret and sorrow for the grave error in judgment that caused pain, loss and grief to the victim's family as well as their own. For those women who are wrongfully convicted, their conviction is always in the forefront of their minds, along with the question of how could they convict me? When will someone come help me, as the days turn to decades? When will my relief arrive? Incarceration is punishment and suffering, but it should be more about justice rather than finality.

## REHABILITATION and RE-INTEGRATION OPPORTUNITIES

by Maria Montalvo

For a moment think about your life, a family member or a friend. Let's keep the thoughts honest and true, food for thought. Have you ever participated or known about having a drink too many, being in an argument that's gone too far, reacted out of anger, on impulse or have been involved in intimate partner violence or in combination thereof? In any of these scenarios it only takes the one time that things go too far and someone could get hurt or lose their life. What happens next with justice is an interaction with the justice system as a violent offender.

According to the Merriam Webster, Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, justice is defined as "the administration of what is just (as by assigning merited rewards or punishments) and the word just is defined as "having a basis in or confirming to fact or reason, conforming to a standard of correctness, morally or legally right, being what is merited. This article is geared towards female, first-time, violent offenders who become caught up in the grasp of mass incarceration simply because of the mandatory minimum laws they are sentenced by. The discretion of the judges has been stripped and replaced with strict laws limiting their

ability to sentence justly because the mandatory minimums dictate a lengthier term of confinement. This is the punishment and deterrent, a way to show society that they are now safe and justice has been served.

There is no handbook for the first-time, female, violent offender to follow. It is a journey through the school of hard knocks and learning as you go. The punishment is not for the woman alone because the sentence also falls on her family, who absorbs her responsibilities within the family. Her children are also subject to not only the loss of their mother, but being placed into the child welfare system if family members are unable to step up to provide child care. So, in addition to the loss of freedom, a woman faces the loss of her children which is a collateral consequence to her confinement.

If her offense involves a co-defendant who is male, she is given the weight, the more severe sentence. On average of comparing the sentences of female offenders and males for the same offense, there is a disparity in sentencing in which female offenders are given lengthier sentences. This occurs despite re-

search studies and empirical evidence supporting that the recidivism rate for women is less than their male counterparts. There is an antiquated thought process behind this.

Women offenders are treated more harshly in the justice system because prisons were not built with the intention of confining women. Linda Singer, a criminologist, reminds us, "Prisons in the past have not been considered a female problem; the system has been run by men, primarily for men." There is nothing designed specifically for women in the system. The design of the uniforms are straight cut, the sweat pants and shirts also follow this design where pant legs and shirt sleeves are too long for the female body. The ability to purchase feminine products is limited because of lack of variety, quality and availability. Even the type and variety of undergarments is limited to ill-fitting bras without support. The issue is not an administrative one, but a problem deeply embedded within the system. The truth is prisons were not built with the intention of housing women for lengthy amounts of time.

Unfortunately, society views women who commit crimes more harshly than men. They have failed in their roles as caregivers, wives, and mothers, thus deserving to be punished. Herein lies the problem,

(continuation from page 2)

many women commit their crime(s) for reasons linked to their boyfriends or husbands. It could be because of a drug addiction that's gone out of control and now they must support their habits, most often by selling themselves, drugs or committing property crimes. Perhaps they were involved in a relationship riddled with intimate partner violence and their abuser loses his life or they felt the need to protect their child. Whatever the reason, the court of public opinion returns to the times of the Salem Witch trials, where no matter what information was produced in favor of the individual, they were sentenced harshly anyway.

For sure, there are crimes that women have committed with knowledge and purpose, but the system can no longer differentiate because of the mandatory minimums. The included crimes can be assault (simple or aggravated), vehicular homicide, aggravated or reckless manslaughter, kidnapping, arson, carjacking and murder. All of these crimes are grouped into the category of violent crimes. The issue is that the crimes in this category are viewed horrifically and there is no consideration of the traumas behind them when it concerns women. All of these scenarios fall under violent crimes and are automatically sentenced in the range mandated by NERA.

The events surrounding violent crimes and women statistically are not likely to reoccur.

Most of the women in

EMCF have a history of being abused, either sexually or physically, at some point in their lives. By the time a woman completes her 85% parole ineligibility, most often, ten plus years has elapsed and her family is broken, her children have grown up, other family members may have succumbed to ailments of aging and ultimately dying, leaving women without their original support systems.

The only hope for first-time, violent offenders is for judges to really contemplate the facts that do not fit into the criteria of the standard mitigating factors considered as support in favor of a lesser sentence. There is one mitigating factor that is seldom used and often overlooked by judges. According to N.J.S.A. 2C:44-1(b)(4) there were substantial grounds tending to excuse or justify the defendant's conduct, though failing to establish a defense according to the record. It would make a difference to a woman who has aggravating (factors in favor of a heavier sentence) and mitigating factors that are equipoise to place consideration to reduce their sentence even by five years. A good beginning for the topic of resolution towards re-integration along with the fears of releasing "violent" offenders to keep in mind according to the article, "The Case

For Capping All Prison Sentences at 20 Years" by Mauer & Nellis:

"Empirical research has consistently found that locking up people for very long periods of time does little to nothing to combat crime and may actually lead to more crime as people spend more time in prison – missing big life opportunities for legitimate careers and being incarcerated with others who have ties to the criminal world. Studies have found that people almost always age out of crime, particularly in their late 30's and 40's. If a person is locked up for a robbery or murder at 21, there's a very good chance that he won't commit the same crime when he gets out at 41."

So, instead of sentencing women to de facto life sentences, consider the words of the author of the book, "Just Mercy" and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, an Innocence Project dedicated to defending the wrongfully convicted and poor, securing exonerations for dozens of the condemned, Bryan Stevenson, "The closer we get to mass incarceration and extreme levels of punishment, the more I believe it's necessary to recognize that we all need justice, and – perhaps- we all need some measure of unmerited grace." Perhaps, in the spirit of Stevenson's powerful message, with some measure of "unmerited grace," now would be the time to initiate change and consideration of innovative ways that would allow rehabilitation and reintegration of first-time, violent, female offenders.



And now it's time for...  
Positive Elevations  
with Natasha & friends



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## THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

by Natasha White

In 1917, a young African American seamstress was thrilled to get admitted to one of New York City's most renowned fashion design schools. But when Ann Lowe Cone arrived from Florida to register for classes, the school director told her she wasn't welcome. Refusing to leave, she whispered: "Please let me stay here." Seeing her persistence, the director let Ann stay.

Undeniably talented, Ann still graduated six months early and attracted high-society clients including former first lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy, whose world-famous wedding gown she designed. She made the gown twice, after a pipe burst above her sewing studio, ruining the first dress. Persistence like that is powerful.

Being in this situation, in this environment, for any amount of time may seem like all your hopes and dreams are over. You may feel that you will never be able to accomplish the things that you've always wanted to do, and that all you've hoped for in life are no more than mere fantasies or daydreams. And that is understandable. However, "persistence", meaning to have determination & diligence in achieving your desires, is the key to life. You are the only one with the power to do whatever it is that you want to do, regardless to any setbacks that have or may have occurred in your life, simply by being persistent. Ever heard the saying, "a setback is just a set-up?" Well, it's true. The only thing that can stand in your way is YOU! Your current situation may seem to be holding you back, or you may feel as if the circumstances or traumas that you've experienced won't allow you to succeed. But be encouraged! Having the Power of Persistence is something no one or no situation can take away from you. Keep dreaming and believing in yourself. And let nothing or no one try and stop you from prospering.

"Even though this [situation] may seem backwards, keep moving forward." -Si'Jarae Lindsey

## STILL IN OUR THOUGHTS

by Maria Montalvo

One area that is very sensitive and not forgotten is the victim of the crime. It may seem like offenders just want to be released from confinement and that is a concept so far from the truth for long timers. There is no way to be a part of a family and not think of what your victim's family is missing; time with their loved one. Sometimes, the victim survives and they live with long lasting traumas from the crime against them.

In April of 2009, I was a participant in a group offered by the Offices of Victim Services called, "Focus on the Victim." This program is very impactful and causes one to really delve into what happened leading up to their offense and the effects of it. One elderly gentleman was kind enough to participate in our group. He offered his insight and perspective about how he felt as a victim of a home invasion. He shared that it was difficult for him to feel safe in his own home and that he was constantly looking over his shoulder.

It was sad on a different level to listen to another human being share that they did not feel safe in their home. He felt that his privacy was invaded and that not only was his home disrespected, but that he had to experience fear for his own life. The reason that he has remained an impactful presence in my life, is because he was able to verbalize to the group that he was able to forgive those who committed the crime against him

and his home. It was a humbling experience to really listen to his words and his gift of grace. I recommend this group to others to encourage empathy towards the victims, their families and themselves. It truly helps in the healing and growth process that offenders experience on their own individual journeys.

When I participated in the "Focus on the Victim" group it was not accompanied by a book. I have been fortunate to have come across a book from a previous group in the library titled, "Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims," by Howard Zehr. Included in this book are portraits and interviews of survivors of severe violent crimes, detailing in their own words and experience how they have been affected. This book is a must read for everyone because crime can happen to anyone no matter where they are or how old they are.

According to Steve Sullivan, President of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, Ottawa, Ontario, "Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims," should be mandatory reading for anyone with an interest in justice, especially politicians, advocates, judges – and anyone who works with victims." Focus on the Victim is a group that has evolved over the years and is now updated. Anyone who is interested can always sign up to be placed on its waiting list.



## The Mighty Pen



.....AND THE BRILLIANT AUTHORS WHO WIELD THEM...

### BOOK REVIEW: Robert Galbraith Books

Hello again steadfast bookworms!! For those avid fans of the worldwide phenomenon Harry Potter series, here is an exciting surprise. Famed author J.K. Rowling, who introduced us to the wonderful world of Hogwarts and wizardry, has upped her game, bringing a new intriguing adult mystery series to life. Writing under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith, she introduces an odd duck in Cormoran Strike, the unlikely hero. An ex-military police officer of the Crown, after being discharged post-injury to his leg, Strike turns private eye and grumpily, but meticulously turns his focus to solving some truly bizarre cases his clients bring. From a macabre and twisted murderer who taunts through clues in *Silkworm* to a famed celebrity diva's questionable suicide in *Cuckoo's Calling*, Strike pieces together the puzzles of his case despite his narcissistic stalker and ex-fiancée, poor finances and the leg injury that causes him constant consternation. Grizzled, grumpy unfashionable yet stoic, sensitive and brave, Cormoran Strike plods along, unlike the famously suave James Bond figure head. In the latest edition to the series: *Trouble Blood*, Strike, while visiting family in Cornwall is approached by a woman asking for help finding her mother, Margot Bamborough, who went missing under mysterious circumstances in 1974. Strike has never tackled a cold case before, but despite the slim chance of success, he takes it on. So find out how this unlikely hero, with the help of his patient secretary/

protégé, overcome the malevolent and cunning forces of evil to bring shadowy villains to justice.  
- by Antionette Stephen

### BOOK REVIEW: *FROM SCRATCH*

Attention hopeless romantics! In the recent Netflix series *From Scratch*, author Tiembi Locke's memoir displays the cultural obstacles faced when an African American woman falls in love with a traditional Sicilian man. Locke's writing style allows you to feel every emotion that Tiembi felt through her tragedies and the loss of the love of her life. The two main characters, Saio and Tiembi, take the journey of love, when all the odds were against them. While traveling in Saio's hometown in Sicily, she is comforted with authentic Italian recipes made with simple fresh foods that were passed down from generation to generation. There, Tiembi finds a healing community and wisdom that gives her hope for the future. So if you love how family recipes hold a special comfort in your heart and you are looking to get lost in a big love story that dared to overcome, then *From Scratch* is a must read! Enjoy!

- by Tina Lunney



Do you have thoughts on a book, series or author you would like to share? Great!! Submit your review to the unit ILC for collection and you may be featured in an upcoming newsletter! You may inspire someone to pick up the book or select the author.



## LEGAL NOTES

by Maria  
Montalvo

### Just Desserts with Prejudice

Most often lay people believe that justice is served and after the appeal process that finality is achieved. There is a common belief that once an offender travels through all of the processes within the criminal justice system that it has been fair, honest and justice has been served. If a person's appeal opportunities are all exhausted they have utilized the system to its fullest capacity to challenge their conviction and they must be, unquestionably guilty and convicted justly. Well, this is not always the case, especially since wrongful convictions exist. Unfortunately, for many defendants they are not able to afford the luxury of private counsel and if they are, those fountains of financing dry up once there is a need for expert opinions. Defense attorneys do advocate for their clients, but when there is no more money to pay for their services, they are gone, regardless of whether or not they believe in their client. This can cause a gap of time that is served before the confined person requests and is approved for the assistance of the Office of the Public Defender.

Unfortunately, this office contains a limited amount of attorneys who are overworked

and overwhelmed with their caseloads and have pitifully, inadequate and limited resources. These constraints limit the ability of the attorney to provide fervent advocacy for their clients. There are attorneys that despite their limitations are fierce in their representation of indigent clients and there are many incarcerated persons that are extremely grateful for that. It has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. However, there is a power dynamic at play and it is not in favor of the defendant or their public defender. Who has the most power then? Defendants new to the system believe that the judge will provide justice for them, by having leniency or finding them somehow innocent if there are facts to support them.

It is fair to think it is the judge who sits high in the chamber, donned in impeccable robes with a gavel in hand, the most respected and revered within the criminal justice system. The issue is their judicial discretion; they have no power in terms of the application of mandatory minimums. They must sentence within the guidelines, so in reality a judge's power is limited unless it is a trial. The majority of defendants plead guilty to avoid going to trial because they fear lengthy sentences. However, there is a caveat there, only the prosecutor knows well the strengths and weaknesses of his case, but he does not share that with the defense. He wants to win the conviction.

So then, who has the power within the criminal justice system? How are the limitations of the public defenders and the judges fair?

The answer is the prosecutor is the one who is powerful in the criminal justice system. Angela Davis states, "Of the many duties and responsibilities of the prosecutor, the charging power is the most important and is the essence of her control over the entire system, especially since the adoption of mandatory minimum laws in most jurisdictions." The result is the imbalance of power and the issue of prosecutorial leeway. After all, they are the defenders of the State and of the victims of crimes, so how could they not be serving justice fairly? A defendant commits an offense and he is taken before a grand jury and indicted. The choice is to accept a guilty plea bargain or proceed to a trial with a jury of his peers. All of this seems fair, right?

Well, here is the problem, prosecutors do not share how strong or weak their case is. So the defense really does not know for sure how to counsel their clients which leads most to accept the plea. According to Brooke Williams & Shawn Musgrave, writers for Prison Legal News, shared in the publication that "Some prosecutors failed to turn over important evidence to defense attorneys or didn't disclose information bearing negatively on witness credibility, others misrepresented evidence in their closing statements to the court." Does this matter for defendants who are the victims of prosecutorial misconduct? Yes,

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it does, these victims of prosecutorial misconduct are sentenced and committed to serve time. One would have to question the fairness of this process. If a defendant commits a crime or fails to tell the truth in court, he is found to have committed the offense of perjury. Are prosecutors held to the same standard? According to Daniel Medwed, a professor at the Northeastern University School of Law, "But there is almost no accountability, no transparency, and the public isn't paying attention - that is a very, very combustible concoction." There is an imbalance here and there are no repercussions for the prosecutor involved.

When judges overturn convictions or indictments because of misconduct, the name of the prosecutor is with-

held. Whenever a prosecutor is found to have committed prosecutorial misconduct they are judged by their peers who do not expose them by name. The prosecutors then go on to be promoted to committees or as judges. How is this fair? Defendants are served just desserts with prejudice, but prosecutors have immunity and cannot be convicted for their offense of prosecutorial misconduct. In the cases of the wrongfully convicted who have served decades within the prison system, not even an apology is given, so where is justice here? There has to be a public awareness raised about the imbalance of power and how the scales of justice are already unbalanced when a defendant is brought into the justice system. There is

no fair or just way to compensate the loss of time, but prosecutors go home, sleep and are pleased with their lives, even after acknowledging their errors. One stands infamous, according to an article in Prison Legal News, "Three prosecutions by Francis Bloom, a former assistant district attorney in Hampden County, resulted in convictions that were later reversed by the courts in cases that involved allegations of misconduct against him." Despite being reprimanded publicly for his actions, he stated, "I put it behind me a long time ago." The issue here is this just desserts or just desserts with prejudice, take time to really reflect on this perspective.



## SATELLITE LEGAL NOTES

by Maria Montalvo



### **Aging out of Crime, Aging out of Society**

It is important for society to be aware of the "aging out of crime" factor. There are many women who have been confined 10 years and longer. Women need more criminologists and sociologists to take an interest in their circumstances and situations within the criminal justice system. Those voices in the community that have a loved one confined and subjected to mandatory minimums need to speak out to their local congressperson. Why are voices from the outside needed? These voices are needed because there are several first-time violent offenders who now are way past the point of "aging out of crime" who are now at the point of "aging out of society" permanently. No matter where a human being is, there is no way to stop the aging process. Humans evolve and they mature, they are no longer their crime because they have changed their way of thinking and of being. They are no longer in the same mindset because of maturity. The mandatory minimum that they are sentenced to increases the amount of elderly and infirm in prison. Even if a person after completing their term at age 70, 80 or 90 is granted parole which does not happen the first time, they are in need of a great deal of social service assistance. We need to ask why? The offender no longer has family members who are alive. If they are, the offender now places a burden on their family because they most likely have developed health problems from years of eating a poor diet, exposure to environmental hazards and substandard medical care. In addition to being in the process of becoming unemployable. This places an added burden and drain on the community who will be receiving the offender in

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need of major social services and support.

In late 2020, the New Jersey Legislature passed, and the governor signed, bills S-2594 and A—2370, which abolished the existing medical parole statute codified at NJSA 30:4-123.51c (effective February 1, 2021) and established a Compassionate Release program, codified at N.J.S.A. 30:4-123.51e, whereby a defendant who obtains a Certificate of Eligibility under the new statute to attest that the defendant suffers from either a terminal condition, disease or syndrome, or, alternatively, a permanent physical incapacity as defined in the new statute, “may petition the court for compassionate release.” The statutes also permit the defendant to request representation from the Office of The Public Defender for the purpose of filing a petition for compassionate release. Here is the major concern for the individual seeking this type of relief. There is a need for two physicians from the DOC to concur on the diagnosis before a Certificate of Eligibility would be considered.

There are other criteria that must be met: 1. A description of the terminal condition, disease, or syndrome or permanent physical incapacity; 2. A prognosis concerning the likelihood of recovery from the terminal condition, disease, or syndrome or permanent physical incapacity; 3. A description of the inmate's physical incapacity, if appropriate; and; 4. A description of the type of ongoing treatment that would be required if the inmate is granted compassionate release. It is sad to observe your fellow wing mate or comrade suffering in the medical infirmary or to watch them being transported back and forth for chemotherapy and radiation treatment. There is some gratitude for the consideration of lawmakers making this concession, but it is not enough when you are observing human beings dying before your eyes. There needs to be a standard criterion that is obtainable for the offender requesting relief perhaps resentencing if they have served the bulk of their sentence. Family members no matter what their loved one has done decades ago would like to embrace them as they are leaving this earth. There needs to be just a little more compassion, mercy and grace in this statute because we are a progressive state that has evolved.

(source:NJAC.10A:16-8.5 Eligibility requirements for compassionate release)

## A LEGAL QUESTION TO PONDER

by Tina Lunney

I have two questions for you. One question I will share my personal opinion, but I'd also like to hear your opinion as well.

**Question 1:** If you could be a judge, prosecutor, or lawyer for a day, what would you choose? Why? And, what would you accomplish during that day?

**Question 2:** If you could amend one law/statute in the criminal justice system, what would it be?



My opinion would be to amend the Mandatory Minimum Sentencing. I believe that each case should be analyzed on an individual basis, and not categorized using the antiquated definitions of crimes. Let me explain. Various cases have many critical determinates that should be considered before implementing and sentencing. Domestic violence, sexual assault, mental health, substance abuse and literacy are just a few factors that should be considered prior to sentence. These factors (among others) are the basis of many crimes, especially amongst women, that should be taken into account before sentencing. One solution would be to adopt a process that across the nation and other countries are utilizing and thriving from: “Specialized Courts”. These specialized courts evaluate critical factors that play a large part in most crimes.



## YOU CAN FIND ME IN DA CLUB!



Hey Everybody!

This is your quarterly social clubs update report. We want to keep you updated, so you can be in the loop to what is going on here on our compound. First, all social clubs on the MAX compound are now starting at 6:15pm and will run until 7:45pm.

The Spanish Book Club, facilitated by Maria Montalvo & Myrna Diaz on Monday evenings, just finished reading, *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coehlo. They recommend reading this book because it is “inspiring, impactful, and contained many life lessons.” They are eagerly awaiting the next book.

Lucretia Stone, who facilitates the non-Spanish Book Club on Monday evenings, just wanted to advise everyone that she is still awaiting the book for the next club sessions, and to please be patient. She is anxious, too.

The Crochet Club, facilitated by Katy Dorsett and Mayra Gavilanez on Tuesday evenings, has added one (1) additional day for your crocheting experience! Now from 12:30pm to 2:30pm on Saturdays, you are able to enjoy the art of crocheting. These days

are for those of you who are already on the list, in the process of a project, and for those of you who are “sorta, kinda” experienced in this skill. You can consider yourself an advanced crocheter.

There are no current updates for the Wednesday evenings Card Club, facilitated by me, and the Thursday evenings, Zen Coloring Club, facilitated by Sweeney, at this time.

GOOD NEWS! Coming soon on Sundays (time:TBD), you will be happy to know that Mayra Gavilanez and Elyse Castillo will be starting a Beginners Crochet Club! This club is for all of you (and me!) who do not know how to crochet, and would like to learn how to create beautiful patchwork. This club has been created for an intimate group of 10-12 I/P’s at a time, learning how to begin and complete your projects. So, if you are already on the crochet list for Tuesdays and Saturdays, you will not be added to the up and coming Sunday movement sheet.

Also coming soon on Sundays, Melanie Slate and Paige Pfefferle will be hosting a Meditation & Mindfulness Club. Here

you will learn different breathing, meditation and mindfulness techniques to soothe and calm you from some of the chaos that we deal with day in and day out around here. So, get ready to “whoosahhhhh”.

Finally, the talented and incomparable Adonis Knyte and I will be facilitating a Puttin’ On Da Hits! Club. We will be holding auditions during this gathering to put on a talent show for the facility. When the time comes to sign up for this club, keep in mind that it is for you to **audition to perform** at the talent show, not to just come and chill like we used to do at the old music therapy group, or the current social clubs. The sign up process will advise you of the specific acts we are looking for, the amount of time for each act, and how many slots are available per genre, all in accordance to the length of time of the talent show. Once all the slots are filled, the continuing sessions will be for “rehearsals only.” So, for everyone who is looking to be a part of the show, get ready because we are looking for you! Stay Consistent!

*Natasha*

In our future issues there will be a “Quote of the Quarter” section included in the Empowerment corner. Please feel free to submit your favorite quote & why it resonates with you, and it may be included in up & coming issues.

BE ENCOURAGED!

## MENTAL HEALTH NEWS:

### YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

by Tina Lunney

If I were to ask anyone who is Simone Biles? Their immediate response would be she is a 24 year old, American Olympic gymnast and four time gold medalist. Yes, that is the correct answer, but she is more than that, she has a new role, she is a mental health advocate and trauma survivor. During the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, gymnast Simone Biles stood brave and tall when she admitted she needed to take a step back from her role as gymnast. How courageous for her to prioritize herself over everyone else, it must have been a very difficult decision for her. But, if Simone did not recognize and acknowledge first to her own self that she needed help, she would have been at great risk endangering her own physical health at the Tokyo Olympics. Even though her fans were disappointed, she was applauded for her courage and admitting she needed to prioritize her mental health. She's telling the world, "It's okay not to be okay". She has set an example for all of us that we shouldn't sacrifice our physical or mental health for anyone or anything.

As we are well aware athletes have high pressure positions and are in the spotlight, but that holds true to many of us. We deal with many struggles in our daily

lives whether it's family, work, school, or life struggles and challenges. Simone has established a positive outcome in a safe place with therapy and the belief to "get in tune" with herself, which helped her to realize she couldn't do it on her own. After her mental health awareness check Simone Biles is now ready to take on the Summer 2024 Olympics in Paris stronger than ever.

Thanks to Simone Biles for helping to revolutionize the way we view Mental Health Disorders and Care. We all should "get in tune."

*According To NAMI, "Mental illnesses are medical conditions that can disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning." To manage your mental health you should include attention to lifestyle, stress management support and also medication as an option".*

**Reminder: May is Mental Health Awareness Month**



## ANXIETY VS INTUITION

### INTUITION:

- A GUT "FEELING" OR "KNOWING"
- ACCOMPANIED BY PLEASANT FEELINGS LIKE CALM & RELAXATION
- FOCUSED ON THE PRESENT
- FEELS GROUNDED

### ANXIETY:

- RESPONSE TO A PERCEIVED THREAT OR FEAR
- PHYSICAL SENSATIONS LIKE FAST BREATHING, NAUSEA, LIGHTEADED
- MORE INTENSE THAN INTUITION
- UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES & FUTURE FOCUSED

**INNOVATIVE REFORM**

by Tina Lunney

I often think to myself “If I could amend one law/statue in the criminal justice system, which one would it, be”? Well, my answer is twofold. One amendment would be to change the Mandatory Minimum Sentencing for violent crimes. This in turn would be feasible if our criminal justice system adopted a procedure that has been implemented all across the nation and in other countries: “Specialized Courts”.

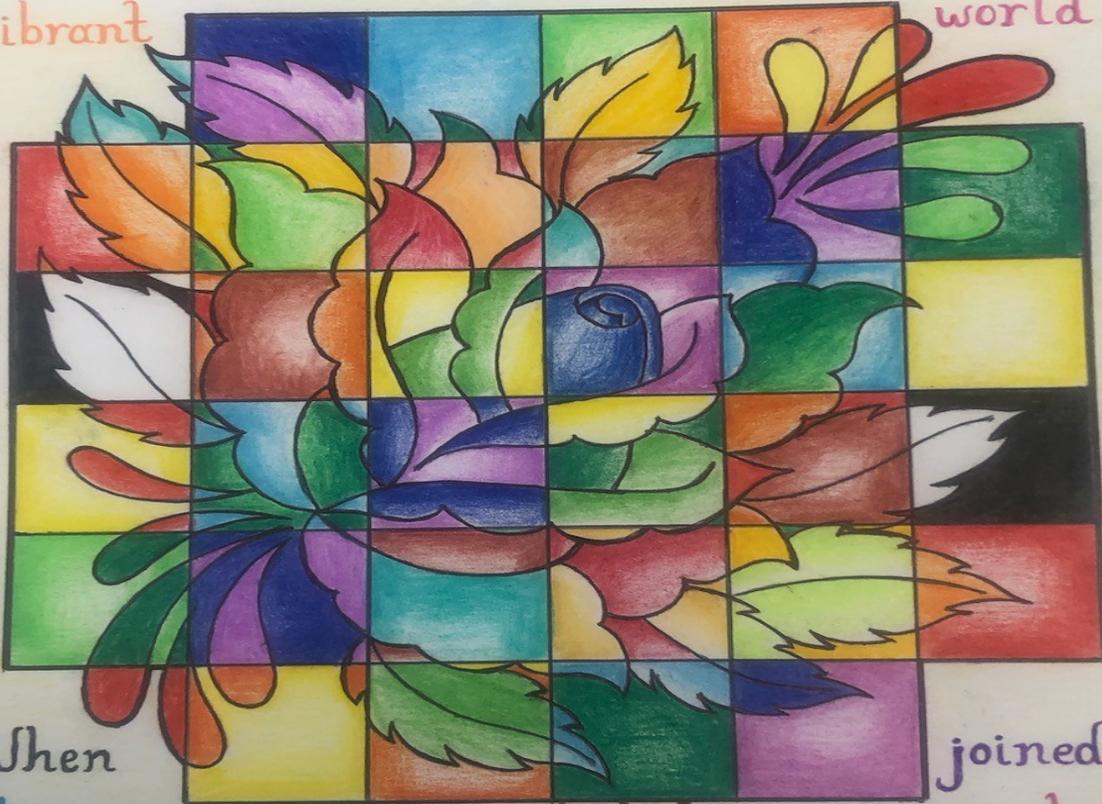
Specialized courts evaluate critical factors that play a large part in most crimes. Various cases have many critical determinates that need to be considered prior to implementing a sentence. With Specialized Courts judges have discretion over the prosecutor and have the availability of impartial experts to evaluate a case in its entirety before sentencing. Allowing Specialized Courts to analyze a case on an individual basis would help alleviate racial, gender, economic and ethnic disparities among defendants’ sentences and inequalities among counties. Currently, when a judge sentences an individual, they utilize mitigating and aggravating factors to weigh the imposed sentence, yet there are other major origins in a case, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, mental health, and substance abuse that should be considered prior to sentencing due to their heavy inferences on the outcome of a case. Presently, the court enforces long term sentences also known as “football numbers” which focuses on time and not the causes of crimes and individuals. These factors (among others) are the basis of many crimes, especially amongst women that should initially be taken into account before sentencing. Specialized drug courts are prevailing and have been working in the criminal justice system, as well as specialized mental health courts. For example, in 1997, there were four mental health courts now there are 300 mental health courts working to help the mental health crisis in the justice system.

Consequently, regarding the Mandatory Minimums component it can go side by side with Specialized Courts. After sentencing you have the option to appeal your case and that is an advantageous tool: to fight your conviction, but, if Mandatory Minimums were eliminated it could alleviate thousands of appeals going through the courts and assist in the judges’ extenuating duties. In addition, the appeal process is an uphill battle and many times the appeal court defines, it as “harmless error,” and the appeal process goes on for years and years with no prevail.

The “tough on crime” rhetoric can hold true with some lawmakers, legislators and communities, but wouldn’t it be beneficial to taxpayers and communities to reduce the prison term and focus on rehabilitating the defendants from the start of their sentence? For example, let’s look at a woman that completed a thirty year sentence at the ripe age of seventy-seven and whose health is declining. First, who will hire someone at seventy-seven years old? Again, she would be burdening the state and communities to support even the slightest of her essential needs. After doing all that time, and completing every vocational and therapeutic group even women leaving with degrees at that age have the odds stacked against them. Everything they have learned will never be utilized. In addition, there is criminal records and stigma which hinders the individual’s re-entry. Ultimately Specialized Courts and eliminating Mandatory Minimums would allow the courts to focus on the source of an individual’s crime at sentencing not to have them try to figure out their lives in 30 years. Let’s continue to be progressive in Justice Reform, not regressive!

## Visions in Visuals

All colors matter in the tapestry of life. Every shade, every hue, every tone, adds to the brilliant complexity of our vibrant world.



When joined in alliance, each color contributes in a special way to create a bold enriching, moving, meaningful work of art. Don't let color divide. Let all colors stand together in one united world vision.

BY ANTIONETTE STEPHEN



Do you have an artistic vision you would like to share? Submit your piece and any blurb about your art to the unit ILC for collection and you may be featured in upcoming newsletters! Remember, no art is wrong or bad! You never know

who you may inspire or uplift!!

-Antionette Stephen -



*Original artwork by Kameelah Kareem*

### **PRACTICING MINDFULNESS**

(Uplifting Quotes submitted  
by Myrna Diaz)

“You have a unique body and mind, with a particular history and conditioning. No one can offer you a formula for navigating all situations and all states of mind. Only by listening inwardly in a fresh and open way will you discern at any given time what serves your healing and freedom.”

- Tara Brach, *True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*

“A modern definition of equanimity: cool. This refers to one whose mind remains stable and calm in all situations.”

- Allan Lokos, *Pocket Peace: Effective Practices for Enlightened Living*

“This is the real secret of life—to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play.”

- Alan Watts, *The Essence of Alan Watts*



## LOOKING AHEAD...toward the FUTURE

### Tina Lunney

Looking forward to a second chance at life will allow me the ability to apply all the tools and education I have learned through the vocational, therapeutic and mental health programs I have completed. I received my Associate's degree and I am currently pursuing my Bachelor of Science degree with Rutgers University. Reentering society will allow me the opportunity to be an advocate and mentor for individuals with mental health needs. In my spare time, I wish to volunteer at the local Red Cross to assist with the needs of communities. Through these years I have gained great insight and wisdom about myself in order to help me as I enter society and be a productive citizen.

### Maria Montalvo

My plans for the future after now completing my Bachelor's in Justice Studies, *Summa Cum Laude*, is to continue using my knowledge as a prison paralegal to establish an innocence project dedicated to women who are wrongfully convicted whose cases are seemingly hopeless because they achieved "finality" in court. There is such a need for women who are confined, and a lack of legal services. I would like to further my education in criminal justice studies. I have grandchildren and family to go home to who would be excited for my return. I would live with one of my two sons excited to spend quality time with them and spoiling my grandchildren rotten.

### Antionette Stephen

As shadowy as my future is currently, my resolve to empower women and female children against domestic abuse and dependency has not wavered. Education is key to independence for marginalized women. Not simply academic but learning their merits and worth. Teaching them to see beyond cultural limitation, know their potential, learn the tools needed to attain it. My goal is to awaken in women I meet in prison and beyond their innate talents, by building a school for underprivileged young girls with a curriculum that inspires and empowers them to chase their dreams.

### Dawn Jackson

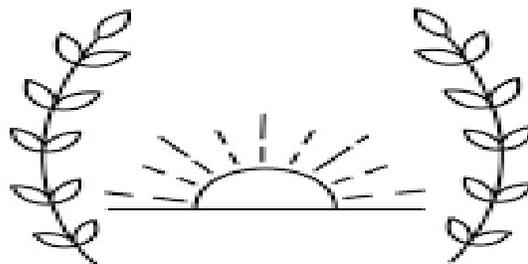
My hope upon release is to make up for lost time with my children. It would be to work or volunteer with women who have suffered trauma and help ease their pain.

### Jamie Farthing

Today, I have a new outlook on life. I have graduated with my B.A. with honors: *Summa Cum Laude*. I am looking forward to continuing my education at Rutgers University and with working or volunteering with young adults at risk. It is my hope to help young women avoid confinement. I am planning on authoring a book.

### Kathleen Dorsett

If I were to go home tomorrow my main purpose would be to care for my mother. I have left my mother alone and to be there to take care of her is my main goal at the moment. I would fight to reunite our entire family before it is too late.



### Angela Brown

If I could go home right now, I would definitely do some nonprofit work with at risk young girls. Something to show them they are loved, they are beautiful, and cared for. Take them on trips, have brunches, and most importantly help them learn from my experiences. Also, I plan on speaking at schools, churches, maybe even at prisons, to not only share my story but to mentor the youth and give them the guidance I never had. I plan to live with my mother and two children.

## ...and SECOND CHANCES

### Melanie Slate

While I was fortunate enough to have entered prison with a university education, I can unequivocally state that I have had another education altogether while inside these walls. Through groups, programming and mental health services, I have come to understand myself and my choices in a way I never realized I needed to. In an effort to do something positive, I tutor GED and ESL students. They have taught me as much as I have them, particularly about the importance of advocacy and education for women. If I left tomorrow, I have no doubt I would be called to continue that work in some way.



### Myrna Diaz

Today, I am ready. I have graduated with my B.A. with honors: *Summa Cum Laude*. I have learned new skills that allow me to work through generational trauma and communicate better. The vocational skills I have been trained on at Edna will allow me to flourish and move forward confident that employment is achievable. I look forward to living with my two sons and for once doing the laundry! I plan to dedicate time to volunteer at the women's shelter and at the Legal Aid Society helping Spanish women. I will also give my testimony in various churches and make an impact!

### Regina Wallace

The anticipation of being released is becoming a reality. My first obligation is maintaining housing for myself and thank God I have support from my family and friends who have residence for me to occupy upon my release. I would choose to live alone and regain my solitude after living with other people in close corners for over a decade. Next in motion would be finding a job and making that my career. After the experience of incarceration and pre-incarceration, I would like to find a position in the Mental Health field. I can definitely relate to those who have mental health issues and I would like to support them or even encourage others on how to address and/or cope with their mental health. I would not mind doing speaking engagements to the youth and even those who are incarcerated.

### Paige Pfefferle

Over the decade that I have been incarcerated I took advantage and utilized every opportunity that was available to me. I successfully completed every social services group along with other groups offered. I earned a college degree, as well as an apprenticeship as an Office Manager from the Department of Labor. Also, on my own I became a certified Paralegal, and was extremely fortunate to work in the Education Department as a Teacher's Aide. If released tomorrow, I would continue working toward a Law Degree. I would work as a paralegal and volunteer helping women and children, while living with my family with hopes of having my own one day.

### Natasha White

Having graduated with a Bachelor's degree, and receiving an Apprenticeship in Business Administration, I will continue on an academic trajectory. I am determined to receive my doctorate in Business/Entrepreneurship (Marketing & Advertisement); plus being involved in many different factions here, I have developed leadership skills. If granted release right now, I would start an on-line business, (COVID has showed me that "brick & mortar" is not completely sustainable) -With a successful business, I will continue to cultivate businesses, which will eventually lead to not only continuing to pay taxes, but create jobs for many people.

### Carline Inginac

So many of us just say home and family but my second chance is to never take life for granted. Always knowing that there is nothing wrong asking for help. That's why I plan on helping foreign teens to be open with communicating with their family. The tools I learned here would help me provide assistance to all those that had feared to get help. But, this time is different I want to create a safe place that allows foreign families a place to strengthen their family in a healthy way. A path that allows them to gain trust in each other.

## ONE DAY OUTSIDE MY PRISON WINDOW

One day outside my Prison Window

A sparrow came to me

I asked "hey little sparrow,

How it feel to be so free?"

He shook his head as he replied "I thought the prisoner was me.....

For you have the ability to pray and only prayer can set you free".

- by Tara Buckner

## UNVEILING MY SOUL

In a world where lines blur, I stand tall and true,  
Unveiling my soul, embracing a hue.  
For I am a warrior, fierce and unbound,  
Transcending the boxes, breaking the ground.

I am the spoken worked, a poem untold,  
Unraveling the secrets, my truth unfolds.  
I dance through the shadows, where silence resides,  
A symphony of strength, where my spirit abides.

Born in the whispers, society's chains,  
I shattered the norms, embraced the rains.  
A phoenix emerging from ashes once burned,  
I claimed my existence, my identity earned.

In the mirror's reflection, I saw a new face,  
A canvas of courage, my journey to trace.  
I shed the old skin, embracing the real,  
A transgender soul, an awakening surreal.

I am the embodiment of bravery and might,  
With each step I take, I reclaim my right.  
To live unapologetically, in my own skin,  
To rewrite the narrative where love will begin.

- by C. Reeves

## SPOKEN WORDS

The holes in my heart are painful,  
having to feel the pain that I feel and turn-  
ing it into a Bright Shining Jewel.

With the words being spoken can  
cut you so deep it can cut you like a sharp  
knife in someone's hand.

The knife is jagged it rips my skin to  
the point of painful scars

I want to lash out with words to let  
them know how I have been hurt.

The pain I have seen will NOT stop me  
from traveling within my own heart

When you speak that FOUR letter word  
LOVE to me and let me see that I am a  
shining jewel

You have helped me see I can Shine  
Bright with my words and NOT my actions.

- by Kandise Dixey



### **BROKEN BUT I'M HEALED**

If I was a broken pot, let me keep my crack,  
 If I was a saucer plate, just put me on your  
 lap,  
 If you drop my bowl or cup don't push me to  
 the back  
 Now if water can't feel me up, still add me to  
 the stack  
 To some I might be old and bruised  
 Don't think that I'm a waste  
 Imported sealed gorilla glue or use a sticky  
 paste  
 Stay mindful where you put it at, don't get  
 none on the base  
 Broken chips, and zig zag cracks gives age  
 upon my face  
 I can be fixed, I won't stay broke  
 These cracks will just define  
 The stress I bore, the worry weight  
 The old me left behind  
 The battle scars, the wounded heart, sad  
 Memories in my mind  
 The cracked and shattered watch I broke  
 over a thousand times  
 Healing has no time frame  
 Like all broken things can't be fixed  
 but if it just have cracks on them  
 then water and glue can't mix  
 the scars may leave an ugly sore  
 that others won't embrace  
 the bitter glue that stains the cup  
 may leave a nasty taste  
 that old cup that you once ignored  
 stood out like an old eye sore  
 place it first right by the door  
 so people may adore  
 that cup from previous mistakes  
 was thrown in the trash bin  
 was taken out, and saved and fixed  
 to heal the cracks within

- by Si'Jarae Lindsey

### **SUFFERING IN SILENCE**

An external examination of love, hugs, and  
 smiles don't always mean it internally.  
 Head nods, short response, and fixated to  
 the one who suffers in silence.  
 Internally exhausted cries for help  
 went ignored and unnoticed.  
 Now whose to blame for the one who  
 suffers in silence.  
 Physical reactions of arguing outburst are  
 mistakenly misunderstood and easily  
 judged.  
 Negative behaviors replace what is felt  
 internally...Suffering in silence.

- Anonymous

### **IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE**

It makes perfect Sense doing time for an  
 offense  
 But I've fought the good fight  
 won Jesus as the Prize  
 And beat the father of lies  
 Now that the victory is sure and done I'm  
 putting the Lord on my heart as number  
 one.  
 Salvation will come to you too this day.  
 Just repent of your sins confess Jesus is  
 Lord  
 And get on your knees and pray.

- by Tara Buckner

“Candid Corner”

By: Carline Inginac

Why did Dracula pass out on New Year’s Eve?  
There was a count down.

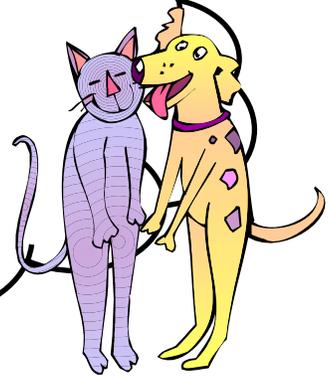
What did the one ocean say to the other ocean?  
Nothing it just waved.

Did you hear about the first restaurant that opened on the moon?  
It had great food but no atmosphere.

Where does a waitress with one leg work?  
IHOP

What is a New Year’s resolution?  
Something that goes in one year & out the other.

DOGS CAN’T GET MRI’S  
BUT CATS-CAN  
- SOPHIA LEONE



What's on the menu?



**HOT SCOTCH CHOCOLATE**

by Si’Jarae Lindsey

*Items needed:*

- 2 half pint of milk
  - 2 hazelnut creamers
  - 1 butter scotch or peppermint candy
  - 2 squares of Hershey plain chocolate
  - 4 or more packets of sugar (to your desire)
  - 1 spoon full of chocolate breakfast essential (optional)
- heat up only the milk, then add the ingredients.

**HA! HA! Riddles**

By Natasha White

1. Mr. Bigger & his son, Junior, were going to explore a cave. The opening to the cave was small, but Mr. Bigger squeezed through the hole. But his son, Junior, could not fit through the hole. Why was this?
2. What did the science book say to the math book?
3. What 10-letter word starts with g-a-s?
4. Why is Alabama the smartest state?
5. Who invented fractions?

(answers on page 51)

The Law does not care whether this individual had access to good education or not, or whether he/she lives under impoverished conditions because companies in his/her communities have shut down and moved to a third world country, or whether previously available welfare payments have vanished. The law does not care about the conditions that lead some communities along a trajectory that makes prison inevitable.

- Angela Davis

From the book: *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide To The Key Civil Rights Struggle Of Our Time* by James Kilgore



**HELPFUL HINTS**  
by Krisla Rezireksyon

If you want to educate yourself about finance for when you go home these books will change your life.

Total Money Makeover Baby Steps Millionaires  
By: Dave Ramsey

The Master Plan  
By: Chris Wilson

Think and Grow Rich  
By: Napoleon Hill

“In order for a true discussion of forgiveness/restorative justice to take place, all of us—not just survivors of crime—must learn to see those who commit crime as human beings. It is easy not to forgive or restore when applying the assumption that the person who has caused harm is less human, incapable of doing otherwise or of changing for the better. Only by rehumanizing those who commit crime is forgiveness/restorative justice (healing) possible.”

-Troy T. Thomas aka Asar I Amen, Lancaster State Prison, California 2014

From the book: *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide To The Key Civil Rights Struggle Of Our Time* by James Kilgore

**HEALTH CARE HUSTLE:**  
**Things You NEED to Know**

By: Melanie Slate

It may seem like March is in the distant future, but the truth is, by the time you read this it will be just weeks away. It's time to discuss something that isn't particularly pleasant, something that might be embarrassing for many people. March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month. So – yes, I am literally talking \*@!t.

You've seen the children's books, and television commercials. Everybody poops. Well, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), colon cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the third most common type of cancer in the U.S. One in 25 woman will be diagnosed with colon cancer in their lifetime. If that doesn't sound like all that much to you, consider this: of the approximately 200 IP's housed in the maximum units now, 8 of them will deal with this disease, its effects, and its treatment in their lifetime.

So, how can we protect ourselves? A person with no family history and without a history of

polyps is considered to be at average risk. The American Cancer Society (ACS), recommends fecal testing every 5 years after the age of 45. For those considered to be at high risk, or those with other conditions that could predispose them to this particular kind of cancer, the ACS recommends more frequent testing. The ACS recommends every person have a colonoscopy every 10 years from the age of 45 on. If you meet this criteria, ask the medical provider about whether or not you should receive a colonoscopy.

While symptoms can vary, the most common include a significant change in bowel habits, especially the presence of bloody stools. Any such symptoms should be brought to the attention of your healthcare provider.



*No one knows your body like you.*

*\*Please note that this article's content has not been verified by an outside healthcare provider*



**NEW YEAR – NEW YOU**  
 by Tina Lunney

Most of us start the New Year off with many good intentions and resolutions. But, sometimes it's hard to stay committed and we fall short when that happens, don't fret, be disappointed or beat yourself up, just reboot and start over. Making positive changes and goals in your life does not have to start every January 1<sup>st</sup>. Life is a journey and a gift. So embrace it and continue to grow emotionally, physically, intellectually and especially spiritually. Change what you need at your own pace. Then you won't feel so pressured to meet the goals of your New Year's resolution and you can enjoy your growth process one day at a time.

**Happy New Year! Stay Focused!**

**"Once you choose hope anything is possible"- Christopher Reeve**

## Medical and THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

by Myrna Diaz

It is that time of season when the weather changes and the flu runs rapid within the facility. When you're forced to go to medical for a clogged nose, banging headache, and a sore throat. Wondering if this, that you are feeling, is the flu or COVID? Knowing regardless, that once you enter the clinic you will be tested and placed on quarantine. The process is a headache in itself for a regular person trying to communicate with the nurse practitioner. But, what about our non-English speaking community? Yes, there are tags on their ID's demonstrating there is a language barrier. Yes, there is the telephone language line that sometimes works. Unfortunately, at other times a few glitches within the system make it not fully efficient.

Recently, our Medical Department, has been going through a transition, improving in some areas, by providing appointments for special care procedures with a specialist: dermatologist, gastroenterologist and rheumatologist. But, there is still a need to provide better assistance to women who in times of an emergency cannot verbally express their concerns. We have all witnessed someone being dismissed because of a lack of communication and a lack of understanding. We've all heard of horror stories of incorrect diagnosis or medication. A good portion of the people who this happens to are those that at times have a language barrier, where pronunciation or sometimes an accent make one word sound like another: hurt or head? Chew or shoe? Garganta or gargle?

But, what about those incidents where decisions have an impact on health and diagnosis? How do we help make medical assistance and in-depth analysis dialog efficient for everyone? A language barrier should not interfere with a patient expressing their ailment and understanding a diagnosis. Most importantly understanding why any procedure is being done to them. This is vital to everyone, English and non-English speaking patients. It is important to remember that once you enter into the medical clinic, you are a patient and not just a number. Oaths are taken to provide/guarantee adequate medical care. Let's make sure that everyone is understood, correctly diagnosed, and treated with respect.



# Bilingual Corner

Saludos, everyone! I am happy to report that Spanish book club has just finished the book, *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. *The Alchemist*, is a book that impacts each reader differently. The story of a young man chasing a fortune, carries life lessons that linger with the reader long after the story has ended.

Each member of the group, has taken away a phrase or snippet from the book that felt personal and impactful. This new insight, has changed our

way of thinking about the small things in life that normally are disregarded. In a brainstorming discussion on the different themes within the book, we were able to perform a small obra (play), that was conducted by one of the women in book club, Mayra Gavilanez. The performers gave a visual enactment (using limited speech) emphasizing body language instead of dialog. It was insightful to see the women interact and

grasp the significance of what was being demonstrated without verbal interaction.

On another note, The Edna Mahan Education Department continues to offer GED Testing in Spanish. Helping our ESL population obtain a significant milestone by being able to obtain a GED Diploma and moving forward with aspirations of enter-

ing college! We applaud all the women who are taking the exam in these coming weeks!! Good



SALUDOS

by Myrna Diaz



*We did it!*

Congratulations to all of the people graduating from the Associates Degree Program this Fall. We are proof that hard work pays off. September 13<sup>th</sup> will be a day to remember!

- |                              |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Chelsea Braunskill           | Dawn Jackson       |
| Angela Brown                 | Myriam Janvier     |
| Jennifer Cebula              | Phyllis Kocheran   |
| Hyphern- Kemberly Dorvillier | Tina Lunney        |
| Raquel Garajau               | Paige Pfefferle    |
| Kokila Hiatt                 | Antionette Stephen |

Congratulations to all of the graduates from the NJ-Step Bachelor's Degree Program. One more milestone accomplished.

Latonia Bellamy, Myrna Diaz, Karla Freeman, Maria Montalvo

Congratulations to the GED graduates!! Great job and can't wait to see you in the NJ-STEP Associates Degree Program.

Briann Lindsey, Chlowe Peterson, Sky-Lyn Reed, Yuwana Roberts, Lotus Unity, Monique Walker

To honor all the students who graduated in 2023, this piece from our previous issue has been reposted. Our apology for the names that were not displayed originally! CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE GRADUATES!

## IF I COULD DO THIS, I COULD CONQUER ANYTHING

by Karla Freeman

Incarceration in the Merriam Webster Dictionary is defined as Imprisoned and Confined. Some people have this perception of incarceration to be a toxic environment created to diminish, abuse, and re-victimize individuals continuously. In many instances this may be true. However, I've witnessed IP'S, including myself, who have transformed for the good, despite my adverse experiences, destructive behaviors and terrible choices. My experiences certainly do not define me or dictate who I am today or what I can accomplish after this part of my life is over. I know that I am greater than all that. It's about breaking free from the cycle of incarceration and dysfunctional behavior. Self-reflection and self-love is a part of that transition. Confinement is

not easy. Yet some people can agree that being imprisoned doesn't mean that you are incapable of progressing successfully.

There are reliable opportunities that you can take advantage of that will guide you on your path: Mental Health Treatment, Higher Education, Cosmetology, Carpentry and Book Clubs just to name a few offered here at Edna Mahan.

Within the last couple of years, I've seen this prison evolve. For instance, Commissioner Kuhn has taken the initiative to come inside the prison and sit down with us women for several hours at a time. During those hours we have pertinent discussions about the betterment of not only this prison but us women entirely. We also speak about tackling issues legislatively. Commissioner Kuhn's compassion and openness has impacted us here in an amaz-

ing way. In addition, the new Administration has given us a voice to be heard when most of us are unheard and unseen. I truly appreciate this part of my journey because now I can utilize my education and experiences to represent myself effectively. As I ponder back throughout my incarceration I acknowledge the fact that M.A.C. (**M**aintain a positive attitude, healthy relationships and a balanced mind. **A**dapt to your environment and embrace your situation while taking advantage of all the positive resources. **C**onquer every situation. Meaning, give your best in all that you do; whether it be in an institution, job, school, programming or building yourself) has helped me through my journey. It can help you too. Incarceration doesn't mean you can't change. It doesn't have to be your down fall or the reason you stay stagnated.



## DO YOU OR SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU SUFFER FROM A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE?

by Regina Wallace

Mental health affects us all. It could be personal or we could feel the effect of a mental health illness from someone we know or love. The American Psychiatric Association suggests that an estimated 300 million people around the world experience depression in their everyday lives. Depression is just one mental health illness that affects people worldwide; there is also: anxiety, anorexia, schizophrenia, bipolar 1 & 2 and P.T.S.D (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) to name a few.

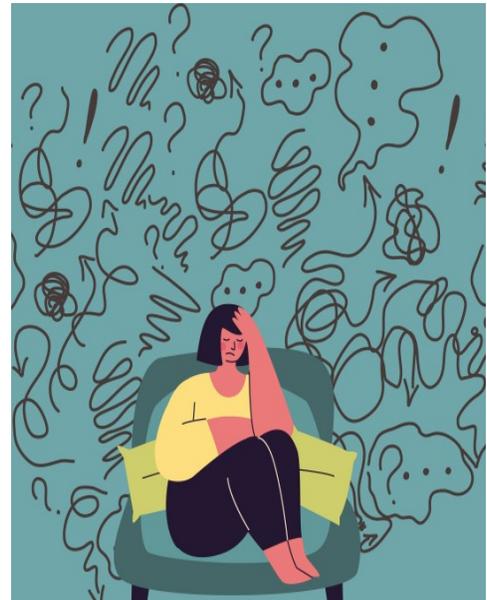
Mental health has always had a stigma attached to it. As the years progress the stigma decreases but never diminishes. I believe a majority of the incarcerated population is confined because their mental illness was not being treated properly and/or being treated at all. In a perfect world there is no mental illness but we all know this world is beyond imperfect so, lets educate, assist and treat ourselves along with others to bring awareness about mental health.

*Let's be aware of a few signs of a mental health illness:*

- Panic attacks
- Feeling alone in a crowded room
- Isolation
- Sleeping too much
- Insomnia
- Avoiding things you like/love

*Let's see how to cope with our mental health illness:*

- Prayer
- Exercising
- Talking to a Professional
- Saying/Writing positive affirmations
- Medication
- Meditation



After you have checked out the signs of a mental illness and the coping skills let's see how many of you can honestly admit that you yourself or someone you know suffers from a mental illness. Please be advised that everyone is different and there are numerous signs to be aware of to see if you are suffering from a mental illness. Check with close friends and ask your mental health department if you feel any of these signs.

### Quotes

by Latonia Bellamy

Sometimes we will go through things that will internally break us down to build us up according to our own strength and willing capability and capacity to change what's hindered us deep within."

"Growth is a Choice"

"Every part of who and what we are have roots of why and how we came to be. Our past experiences reinforce present actions and triggers."

## WHAT UNITES US ALL

by Melanie Slate

After 17 holiday seasons behind these walls, you'd think I'd have gotten better at navigating them. (You'd be wrong.) Had someone told me I'd spend 17 Christmases here, I would not have survived. I'm not saying that for dramatic effect – that's facts. Ask someone who's done a significant amount of time about the holidays – many will tell you it's just another day. (It's not.) They'll tell you some years are easier than others. (Fair enough, but this year was not among them for me or those closest to me in here.) Speak to those same people, and you're bound to find a number of shared experiences – loss is the most ubiquitous and inexorable among them, and it takes many, many forms; it unites us all.

Loss is the cornerstone of incarceration. Punishment as well as any ostensible rehabilitation are both predicated on our removal from society. The resulting losses will take forms both expected and unexpected. Those same losses will then be compounded and amplified by watching those who have supported and cared for us suffer that much more as a direct result of our absence. Call it what you will – loss is the gift that keeps on giving both directly and indirectly. Pain is the product of loss. We naturally recoil from pain. If you touch a hot stove, you pull your hand back. But, what happens if you can't move your hand – if it's being held in place? The flame and the pain that comes with it are inevitable. The only questions are, how hot will the flame be, and for how long? How badly will we burn?

A lot of losses are obvious, but nonetheless tear us down. Time spent with friends and family, milestones missed especially for those IP's fortunate enough to have contact with their children. Some losses, however, produce exceptional suffering. The end of a significant relationship, the death of a loved one. The result is the inability to grieve completely or render comfort to loved ones who are suffering or any sentiment or meaningful basis.

Whether guilty or innocent, we all carry

responsibility and guilt regarding the losses our absence causes for those we love the most. For the toll exacted on them by us leaving them.

When I began this bid, my only goal was to get home in time to raise my children. Suffice it to say that ship has sailed – and sunk. Like so many mothers, my parental rights were taken from me. I have no contact with, or knowledge of, my sons. I mourn their loss like a death while watching it continue to crush my family even after all this time. Now, my goal – freedom – is a desperate race to get home and care for my parents before they die. I watch the women around me who lost that particular race. The sadness and the powerlessness are suffocating.

Significant loss gives birth to grief. Grief itself may come in different forms, and make no mistake – no matter how successful someone's rehabilitation is, no matter what they achieve while here – there is no winning. There are only degrees of losing. Coping skills may elude some people.

As someone with considerable time in, I can say this: make it your business to seek and develop coping skills. It's natural to withdraw from pain, to hide from it, to seek to numb it or dull it. What I've learned after these years is that these strategies do not represent sustainable solutions. In fact, they prolong the worst of the pain. I've learned to allow myself to feel it, to process it with trusted people, including mental health professionals. We have little autonomy behind these walls. The only control we can exact isn't whether we deal with grief & loss, but how we choose to do it as well as the lessons to be learned from it.



## NO RULES TO GRIEVING

by Paige Pfefferle

There are no rules to grieving. We grieve awkwardly, imperfectly. We flounder through, kicking and screaming. With anger while we barter, bargain, and negotiate, ultimately until we surrender to the pain. We neither understand nor recognize ourselves or our own behavior while we're grieving our losses. Grief however, is a universal thing no matter who you are or where you are, you will at some point or another experience it. As each individual's grief process is different. Someone who is incarcerated faces a whole different beast.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross states, that the grief processes is made up of 5 stages – denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and finally acceptance. This looks like a clean cut process on paper but in reality it is messy and heavy and often too much to handle especially in this environment. We don't have any outlets to truly process our grief and we often get stuck in one of the phases. Grief is draining, exhausting and can wear us down. In over a decade of being here, I've lost my older brother and my Poppy, both unexpectedly. My biggest fear in life was losing my Poppy – and that fear has come true. This is the greatest loss I will ever experience and the worst place to experience it and I can honestly say I don't know how to get through this. I find myself vacillating between anger and sadness. Unable to comprehend how this has happened or why. My wants and needs have changed and I'm not the same person that I was. The entire trajectory of my life has shifted because my Poppy is no longer here.

For anyone who is experiencing grief, it is ok to feel every stage of it. It is ok to be stuck in a particular stage. If what is best for you is to "cocoon" right now that's ok too. There is no need to expect more from yourself during this time. Be gentle and compassionate with yourself. Grief has no timeline or expiration date you move at your own pace. It's easier and safer to remain in our "cocoon" while grieving, but you'll know when you are ready to move on to the next phase of the process or the next phase of your life. Always know you are never alone in your grieving process and reach out to someone when you need help – Before long, you will take wings and fly.

### Suggestions to consider:

- |  |                                      |   |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Go to benches                                     | 14. Decorate your area               | 29. Pray  |
| 2. Exercise  | 15. Do a puzzle                      | 30. Read the Bible/<br>Qu 'ran                      |
| 3. Listen to music                                   | 16. Sit with friends                 | 31. See mental health                               |
| 4. Go to yoga  | 17. Cook                             | 32. Make a list of goals for<br>yourself            |
| 5. Play a game                                       | 18. Express your creative<br>side    | 33. Do your hair                                    |
| 6. Sign up for a club                                | 19. Journal – write poetry           | 34. Walk outside                                    |
| 7. Go to a religious<br>service                      | 20. Learn something new              | 35. Make a phone call                               |
| 8. Join "Releasing Trau-<br>ma & Embracing<br>Faith" | 21. Start a vision book              | 36. Clear your area or<br>wing                      |
| 9. Sign up for Beauty<br>School                      | 22. Start a manifestation<br>journal | 37. Write a letter                                  |
| 10. Sign up for a Social<br>Services group           | 23. Meditate                         | 38. Reorganize your<br>space                        |
| 11. Take a collage class                             | 24. Do a word-search/<br>crossword   | 39. Offer to help someone<br>else who might need it |
| 12. Watch a favorite show                            | 25. Do your make-up                  | 40. Write a letter to the<br>person you're missing  |
| 13. Read a book/<br>magazine                         | 26. Cry                              |   |
|  | 27. Dance                            |   |
|  | 28. Make a gratitude list            |   |

**IN THE KNOW**

- by Myrna Diaz

**Can A Woman Stand Her Ground!**

At the first trial I got a hung jury. Before the second trial, that's when I was given a deal – fifteen years - The Judge said if I lost trial, she was going to give me the max because she didn't believe that I was a battered woman. It didn't matter to her that I had iron marks on my chest, iron marks to this day on my arms, bruises and scars all up and down my body. Back then, the battered woman syndrome was just becoming a factor. There was no consideration, no compassion for the fact that people like me were fighting for their lives in their own homes. There was no consideration of the fact that I was just like a prisoner coming out of war.

- Sheri Dwight, who pled guilty to killing her husband after more than a year of abuse.

**How Long Should the Stigma Last?**

In 2007 Yolanda Quesada had worked at Wells Fargo Bank in Milwaukee for five years. For some reason, the bank decided to do a criminal background check on her. They found that Yolanda had two shoplifting convictions when she was eighteen, some forty years earlier. Although she had a clean record for four decades and an excellent job history at Wells Fargo, the company fired her, claiming that the federal law prohibited it from employing any one with “a criminal record involving dishonesty or breach of trust.” For some employers, the stigma of a criminal conviction never goes away.

**How Does Deportation Work?**

When you get deported, you don't simply get picked up by the police and get dropped off at the border. After you have an encounter with police, several things can happen. If you're very lucky, the police will simply let you go. In most instances, however, you will be taken to jail. From there you may be released or picked up by immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) and taken to an immigration detention center. If you end up in a detention center, you wait for a

deportation hearing. It may take months or even years before this hearing takes place. During that time, you may be released or held in the detention center. You may also be moved to an immigration detention center in another part of the country while you wait. Some people may also be subject to criminal charges before they have a deportation hearing. If you have no previous conviction for illegal entry, you may be sentenced to a federal prison for up to six months. If you have previous illegal-entry convictions, you may spend several years in prison even if you are guilty of no other crime. Once you complete that term, you will be returned to an immigration detention center to have your deportation hearing.

**The Innocence Project.**

The zeal to incarcerate has spilled over into prosecuting and sentencing many people who are completely innocent. In recent years, advances in forensics, especially the use of DNA evidence, has provided the basis for overturning many convictions of people who have been in prison for decades. The Innocence Project, funded by Barry Scheck and Peter J. Newfeld, has investigated hundreds of cases. Their work has led to the exoneration of more than three hundred people, including eighteen who served time on death row. Robert Bain, a Florida man who served thirty-five years, is the longest-serving individual freed by the work of the Innocence Project so far. Beyond the Innocence Project, lawyers and other individuals have also pursued investigations of possible wrongful convictions. In 2014 alone 125 people were freed from prison because they were incarcerated for crimes they did not commit. Many had pled guilty because of poor legal advice or because they were threatened with longer prison terms if they took their case to a trial and were found guilty.

From the book: *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide To The Key Civil Rights Struggle Of Our Time* by James Kilgore

**Non-Fiction Spotlight - Recommended Reading**

- by Maria Montalvo



*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander is a powerful resource for all times. This book provides her definition and perspective on mass incarceration and its effects. It contains a plethora of knowledge and can be used as a source to support arguments in a new way. More importantly, it details how mass incarceration came about, it's history, connecting the current incarceration crisis to slavery through the use of examples and careful analysis.

Alexander reveals how mass incarceration has the ability to change labels, but maintain the same objective - discrimination with deep roots within the criminal justice system that legalizes unjust practices.

Alexander's 10th Anniversary Edition helps readers to understand the impact of different Presidential administrations and the legacies they have left behind that impact the criminal justice system. Her unforgettable argument, “We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it,” still remains relevant today. She reveals how mass incarceration has developed and the criminal justice system supports it. The book exposes the hard truths about the consequences of incarceration on an individual and on a group of people, and its lasting way after release. Michelle Alexander is a civil rights attorney, legal scholar and advocate for those without voices. Her book will be useful for anyone interested in criminal justice studies, those interested in advocating or just as an informational read. It can serve as a source of reference for those who are history enthusiasts. For those who want to delve deeper into the origins of African American history and their interaction with the justice system, this is a must read.

## HEALING: INCARCERATION FOR HOPE

BY Usha Desai



My vision and perception is changed, by being incarcerated; materialistic things have no value over God. I feel everyday a closeness to God and his heart. God had a better plan for me! He sent me here for a reason. While being indoor waiting every day for the open door, I see a vision of hope, by reading, going to bible study and doing prayer together with others. Reading from the bible teaches us how to make the world sin free. If there is anything I can do to change and to give God back His sin free world, I would. I can't see the world and people suffering with alcohol abuse, narcotic abuse, domestic violence abuse and so many other violence's continue endlessly. Instead of getting violent, they should seek a connection to their God or Higher Power to make the world a better place. By being incarcerated and away from my family, causes me pain and suffering every day, but I cry out loud and talk to God, 24 hours, asking for protection for my family.

I had read literature about the reason why Jesus had died on the cross and that touched my heart. I was being raised in a Hindu family as an Indian, but I have always loved different cultures, their way of living and different foods. I learned because I barely eat any food beside fruits. I talk to God every day and tell him how I feel. My desire is to make God happy and his children. God's love is the same for everyone, he never looks at color, race, or religion or backgrounds.

While incarcerated, I completed 3 journals, in addition to my 40 hours continuation class. I wanted to use my time wisely. I never had time for myself at home because I was raising two kids and caring for my parents. I took care of others and I never had time for myself. While incarcerated being locked up and feeling down, I try not to allow my kids or family be affected by that. I always try to give positive inspiration to them. My Mom inspires me as well as my kids, whatever happens to you, don't forget God. My son Avi and daughter Shivani say, "Mom, you take care of yourself, we are fine and we are praying hard for you to come home." I feel so proud to hear my kids saying all these mature things, talking positive and taking care of their responsibilities. Being incarcerated, waiting for hope and a new vision, helps me to see the world differently. When I return to live in the community I want to help the needy and the poor. By being incarcerated, I hear my friend's stories and feel their pain, their suffering and it teaches me a lot. I ask God to give me wisdom and courage to help make the world a better place. I love God more and pray more every day. By being incarcerated I learned the value of little things and with this wisdom I am a better human. The Holy Spirit is within me and always wants me to help others and to love one another by being instilled with peace and happiness. I thank you all, American staff and food services people, doctors and nurses who work to keep us healthy and safe. I became connected with God because of my incarceration, while waiting for the door to open. I want to change my life to have a stable home in New Jersey and make my family and friends proud. I want them to be proud that because of my incarceration I have a new identity with pure love. Thank you.

### Journaling for Inner Peace

There are times when emotions need to be expressed and released. I recommend journaling for those days that require self-inventory and self-examination. When you have a few moments of uninterrupted silence, you may want to try the following exercise: A regular journaling practice is a lovely way to check in with yourself. Dedicate a few minutes each day to examine your experience through writing. This exercise is best to do in the morning and at night in order to start and end your day with mindfulness. It is also useful to have a dedicated journal or notebook for this practice.

1. Set aside five minutes in the morning to sit down and journal.
2. Take a few breaths, grounding yourself in the present moment.
3. For a few minutes, mindfully write about your current experience and the day ahead...ask yourself if you have any worries, hopes, or events on the mind.
4. Finishing your journaling practice, return to the breath for a few moments before moving on with your day. At night, return to this practice. For five minutes, reflect on your day.

- From the book: *Practicing Mindfulness 75 Essential Meditations* by Mathew Sockolo  
Submitted by Myrna Diaz

**NOW, HOW THE STORY GOES**

Weakened....Broken....Fallen  
 Black eyes, cut lips, bruised skin....the usual pattern  
 Pitying eyes say innocence stolen  
 Then cast aside....so easily forgotten,

Memories torment, the nightmares blur  
 Fear, anxiety and guilt....the new regular  
 Sleep is a blessing but yet so rare  
 Justice was served, evil contained....they glare,

Blood on your soul, you cannot erase  
 Tormented every minute, every hour....all your days  
 Mercy!!! Unyielding pain has your mind screaming  
 A deadly mistake....too late for mercy....No one is listening.

You learn to breath, you learn to live  
 Laugh at your pain, learn to forgive  
 Remember the past, pay attention to the present  
 Don't forget the scars, stay rooted in the current

Fairy tales are an illusion, life is an unyielding learning curve  
 Greed, envy, jealousy dominate.... Be quick to swerve  
 Hang on to true friends, learn to compromise so you survive  
 Cry a little, laugh a lot, let the pain evolve so you can thrive  
 Weakened....Broken....Fallen....Not Anymore  
 Stronger....Fiercer....Bolder....Now, how this story goes.

- by Antionette Stephen

**WHO KNOWS?**

When life throws loops your way  
 Do you dance in the rain?  
 Or do you run away?  
 And say \*\*\*\* the pain.

Do you stand your ground and  
 fight?  
 Or crumble and fall.

Do you stand for what's right?  
 Or do nothing at all?  
 Is it worth your time?

Do you spend your energy?  
 Or stand on the sideline?  
 And see what the end will be.

How do you know how to act?  
 You must look in you  
 Cause that's where the answer is  
 at.

- by Adonis Knyte

**ONE DAY**

There's not a long-timer in this prison that hasn't dreamed of that long awaited day of finally being released from prison. The fear, anxiety, hope, and eager joy rolled into the anticipation of being reunited with loved ones....hoping they are still there. Living in large groups it's inevitable to hear of tragedy all around you and not experiencing it yourself. The longer you're here the more endangered species a loved one becomes. We've all experienced freedom not coming soon enough to be able to spend "just one more day" with them...."Please Just One More Day," is whispered in hushed prayer and becomes almost a mantra in the waiting....hoping. So my freedom will be spent cherishing my remaining loved ones and enjoying that "One Day." I spent decades hoping it would come. Everyday after that I look forward to showing them the woman I've become, so they will be able to see they no longer have to worry about me.

- by Jamie Farthing



### UNHEARD LOVE

When I look in the mirror I see what the inside world sees of me. A dark complexion woman serving some very serious time. Disregarding the life she took from another family hard work and time. But, that isn't just me a number, a charge, my color of my skin. Cause deep within, is another piece of me I hold within. I'm a Haitian American trapped inside these walls. Hurt from so many before I got placed behind some hard walls. I've been kicked, pushed, and even degraded. All because he saw me as a women that deserved to be mistreated. I was only 8 when it all began to fall. When all I wanted to do was to tell it all. Scared, terrified, holding so many secrets who can I really trust when I only felt defeated. Now look I'm here away from my family all because he forced me to do something that was wrong. He made me choose my life or to do as he says. In a blink of an eye I thought he truly really loved me but when I closed my eyes again and open it up. I realize that the love I thought I had just really sucked.

- by Carline Inginac

### DISTANT LOVE

Attached by birth,  
holding you deep in my heart.  
Separated, many miles apart.

Time and space  
separating, a mother and child.  
Days turn into weeks,  
weeks turn into months  
and months turn into years,  
with another milestone being missed.

Photographs of months reveal their  
evolution,  
a heart of joy created with tears  
Time and space separates.

Heart broken and in love with every sight of you,  
longing and craving special moments with you.  
Concrete walls and gates physically separate

Yearning to hug you and kiss all over you.  
Teary eyes throughout every visit.  
Phone calls ending with a soulful cry  
sobbing and crying "Mommy I want to go to your  
house".

Too young to understand moments in timeout.  
Screaming and shouting, "I want to go to your  
house."

Nothing can mask a mother's pain.  
We fill a void that no one else can fill or feel.  
Time and space, forced a separation.

- by Latonia Bellamy

## COMING IN NEXT ISSUE . . . .

**NEW INITIATIVES.....**

**NEW IDEAS.....**

**AND EVEN MORE IMPACTING AND INSIGHTFUL ARTICLES. IP'S, START BRAINSTORMING AND WRITING! ALL OUR ARTISTIC GENIUSES START SKETCHING AND DRAWING! WE LOOK FORWARD TO RECEIVING NEW SUBMISSIONS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE !!!!**

### **EDITOR'S NOTE: A MESSAGE of APPRECIATION**

We would like to extend a message of appreciation to Mr. Ryan O'Dea, Administrator of EMCF for approving the newsroom's collaborative effort towards the creation of the "Perceptions Reimagined" newsletter and for providing the necessary space and office equipment to produce it. We would like to extend a special thank you to Ms. Sferlazzo, our dedicated Program Director, who is always available to ensure that our programming takes place.

Another area that is often overlooked, but not forgotten is our custody staff. From the majors who facilitate the approval of items, to our custody staff that support and assist us to have programming in a safe place that allows comfortable interaction with our peers, we thank you. We appreciate you all for serving as a constant conduit for our daily stability within the institution.

We welcome Ms. Nafeesah Goldsmith, who has joined our newsroom to facilitate the movement of the production of our newsletter. She serves as the personification of what education, determination and hard work can do. She serves as an inspiration and great source of pride for EMCF.

# BY EMCF FOR EMCF



### EDITORS

**MYRNA DIAZ AND  
MARIA MONTALVO**

### THE TEAM

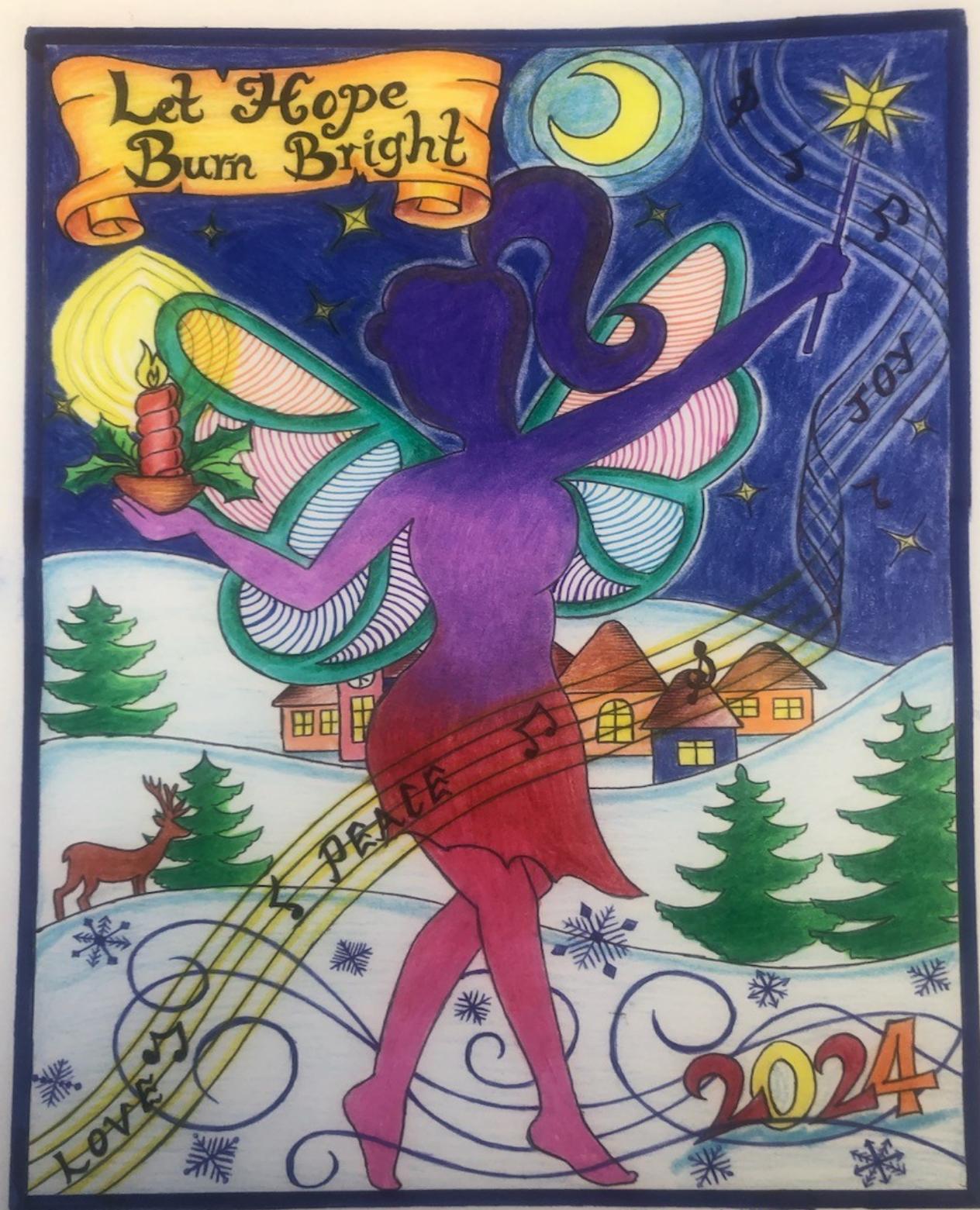
Crystal Afanador, Chelsea Braunskill, Angela Brown, Jamie Farthing, Dawn Jackson, Myrna Diaz, Katy Dorsett, Carline Inginac, Si'Jarae Lindsey, Tina Lunney, Maria Montalvo, Paige Pfefferle, Shaniqua Pierre, Melanie Slate, Antionette Stephen, Regina Wallace and Natasha White

Answers to riddles:

1. Because he was a "little" Bigger.
2. "I've heard you have a lot of problems!"
3. Automobile
4. Because it has four "A's" & one "B"
5. Henry the Eight

“LET HOPE BURN BRIGHT”

by Antoinette Stephen



BY ANTIONETTE STEPHEN