

Wisdom Without Walls II

Part II of the Wisdom Without Walls crossover occurred on January 31, 2008 and focused on women 55 and older, the parole board, and the governor.

Location: California Institute for Women, Chino, California

October 2nd, 2007

Introduction

Women and Criminal Justice Network sponsored a day-long event at CIW titled "Golden Girls and Re-entry". Some 76 men and women from the outside met with 96 women in-

side to address the issues of growing old in prison and the challenges women face to re-enter society. Through small dialogue groups the women identified the challenges of re-entry like finding housing, transportation, finan-

cial support and medical care as elder women. They talked about the need for advocates to assist them and their desire for assistance to be reconciled with family members or even to apologize to their victims or victim's Ms. Francis' release is the result of a collective effort of hundreds of concerned community members who supported her freedom over the course of many, many years. Tremendous thanks to all of you who took the time to write, call, and fax the Governor urging him to release Ms. Francis! Together, we make a difference!

We also want to express our deep appreciation to partners at USC's Post-Conviction Justice Project. Mike Brennan and students at the Post-Conviction Justice Project have been representing Ms. Francis for years. Their tireless and vigorous advocacy on behalf of Ms. Francis' release is truly inspiring! We join Ms. Francis and her loved ones in celebrating her precious freedom! Again, thank you for supporting the struggle for justice and freedom for incarcerated domestic violence survivors.

family members. However, throughout the day women expressed disappointment that most of them will never get the chance to face these challenges head on. The key issue, aging women prisoners assert, is a Cali-

fornia parole system structured to ensure that very few inmates with life at the end of their sentences (for example, 15 years to life) will ever be granted parole. No matter how hard they work at rehabilita-

tion, expressing remorse for their crimes, and putting together an acceptable parole plan that includes housing and a job, most are denied parole repeatedly.

ries of "in and out"; we merged into groups of highly motivated citizens united to share our concerns, knowledge and wisdom. We brainstormed to find the common thread, to spark the flame in those who could help initiate change, in an effort to accomplish the ultimate goal – the release of the elderly population from prison and their reunification to family and society.

We have all met the expectations of the term rehabilitation, yet the system fails to do their part and release us back into society. They continue to find excuses to keep us incarcerated, stripping us of hope, optimism and our freedom.

Your commitment to us to change the broken system that continues to keep the elderly population of women incarcerated was felt by all. The energy, love and compassion remain with us as we continue on with our daily life and routine, praying that one day the despair and chains of imprisonment will be in the past.

-A Golden Girl

Wonderful News of Elnora Francis!



We are thrilled to report that the Governor has approved parole for Elnora Francis, 68 year old! Ms. Francis is released from prison after serving nearly 24 years of a 15-years-to-life for sentence for the death of her abusive husband in 1984. This was the 4th time the parole board had found her suitable for release.

Reflecting on the Event

How does one begin to describe the transformation that took place on that day of the crossover? As the outside guests and inmates began to arrive, socialize and mingle we seemed to cross the bounda-



Reflections from Women in Prison

Vonda White, Lifer

It was a delightful day; living proof that cumulative experiences add up to a stunning whole. As one Golden Girl remarked, "This day will give us something to talk about for the rest of the year."

I was overwhelmed by the wisdom and insights of some of our CIW Golden Girls and the most *powerful* outside women I have ever seen. I believe these *wise* elders will do much for us.

I learned again that society does not value or make use of the wisdom and spiritual energy of its aged ones.

I now see what is driving women on the 'outside' to come 'inside'. It is a desire, a need, to serve usefully and meaningfully. It causes me to consider my own use of time and energy in this so-very-needly place.

Donna Jelenic, Chairperson for the Golden Girls

How does one begin to say thank you? Please tell the women and our one gentleman how much they were appreciated and what a special part they played in making the women feel special. There are so many lonely women here; each and every visitor from the outside made our Golden Girls feel as though they are no longer alone. May God bless you all.



Betty Broderick

It was a well balanced day with laughter and tears; if there were any "get downs," we didn't hear them because we were all suspended in pure bliss. We escaped this place for one wonderful day thanks to the outpouring of love and support from the Women and Criminal Justice Network. We felt the love and felt nourished in mind, body, and spirit.

Areas of Critical Concern

Spiritual and Emotional Issues

- Depression
- Loneliness
- Fears
- Lack of Respect
- Hopelessness

Medical Issues

- Inadequate access to physical and mental care
- Poor nutrition, made worse when women have a medical condition (eg. diabetes, post-chemo, therapy problems, etc)
- Fear of dying; dying alone
- Fear of revealing issues due to threat of being sent out to Chowchilla (CCWF or VSPW)
- Medication monitoring

Spanish Speaking Women

- Language isolation and discrimination



Parole Board's and Governor

- The governor does not support parole boards recommendations for parole dates
- The parole board makes capricious decisions.
- Family and women getting older is no consideration for release

Next Step

Wisdom Without Walls Part II: Golden Girls and Re-Entry

February 1, 2008

10am-3:30pm

Part II of Wisdom Without Walls will be focusing on the women 55+ and older, the parole board, and the governor.

If you are interested contact:

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You can also find more information about issues regarding criminal justice by visiting:

www.womenandcriminaljustice.us