



WAM

WOMEN'S ADVOCATE MINISTRY

NEWSLETTER OF
WOMEN'S
ADVOCATE
MINISTRY, INC.
AUTUMN, 2005

We Dare to Care

Women's Advocate Ministry, Inc. (WAM) is continuing to fight the good fight for incarcerated women and their children. For the past 22 years the struggle has been intense but worth the effort: much has been accomplished over the years.

Recently I was watching an Oprah Winfrey show about women around the world. A guest from another country said she felt American women were "insensitive" to what was happening around the world to their counterparts. Oprah responded with an excellent observation, saying, "It is not that we are insensitive: it is because no one has told us". When I am talking to groups about the WAM program and issues we encounter, I often hear, "Reverend Bovian we did not have a clue that some of these things were going on."

In this newsletter I will share with you some clues. The time has come for us to become aware of our criminal justice system and why it should be more humane, especially in matters that are "not a part of the women's sentence" ie: abuse, rape, and the loss of basic human rights. This is not just an issue of improving someone's life in prison: it truly affects all of us, regardless of where we live.

WAM is now in its 22nd year as a supportive presence for incarcerated and newly released women. WAM acts as a friend and advocate for the women from their first phone call, usually at the time of their arrest, through their court process, imprisonment or program rehabilitation and re-entry into society.

As a crisis intervention program, WAM provides services that enable healing and reconciliation for incarcerated women in need. Once the women are released back into society, it is our intention that they never return to the criminal justice system as clients. In March of 2004, WAM began its re-entry mentoring program for clients being released into society. Each client is now assigned a mentor to help her

adjust to the outside. Some of these women have never operated a computer or used a cell phone. The modern world is daunting even to those of us who live with it every day. Imagine coming into it with no working knowledge whatsoever. A mentor is crucial to this adjustment. Although some women do return to the prison system, WAM never forgets our mission to "Dare to Care" about other human beings. We never refuse to help a woman or her family when she needs us. WAM knows that our hopes cannot always be realized. It is a sad fact that prison life often begins an inter-generational cycle. Approximately 80% of the women who are incarcerated are mothers whose children become vulnerable to the criminal justice system. These children, many of

whom enter the system as juveniles and again as adults, cannot be ignored. In April 2005, WAM joined in partnership with the New York City Mission Society-Amachi/NY Program to provide crucial mentoring services to the children of incarcerated parents. It makes a difference.

Throughout its existence, WAM has helped the families of our clients. Each year at our annual Christmas Party our clients return with their families to let us know they are doing well. WAM also supplies mentors for children of incarcerated mothers, if their current caregivers agree.

Recently I had the privilege of being invited to the graduation of the daughter of one of WAM's first clients; she was receiving her master's degree at Hunter College.

WAM advocates for pregnant and parenting women at the Rose M. Singer Correctional Facility in Queens, New York. WAM conducts workshops for the women apprising them of their rights and responsibilities as mothers. Many of the women at Rikers Island have been arrested for drug and alcohol related offenses. WAM will recommend and find rehabilitation programs for them. The majority of these women are successful in completing their program.



Should a client leave Rikers Island House of Detention and go to one of New York's correctional facilities, WAM continues our support. Our goal is to see that their lives are productive and positive. It does not help society or the client to waste a life behind bars. WAM has a very successful mentoring project for women in the state facilities called the "Prayer Partner/ Pen Pal Program". Some of these mentors have been writing and visiting the women for many years as well as sending them care packages. They make sure that these women do not "fall through the cracks" and become lost in the system.

Women's Advocate Ministry is continuing in our tradition to service the poor, the disempowered, and the disenfranchised women in New York City who get caught up in

the bureaucratic criminal justice system. WAM does not judge their faults, only their needs. The women served are traumatized, confused and often angry. With our trained corps of volunteer advocates we provide the support needed for the women to overcome their fear and sense of isolation, to still make something good of their lives. Your support is crucial to maintain this ray of hope. Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your tax-deductible donation, so we can continue our important mission. For our clients, their families, and ultimately for our society, it makes all the difference in the world.

— Reverend Annie M. Bovian
Executive Director

WOMEN IN PRISON FACTS

Source: Women in Prison Project—The Correctional Association of New York

UNITED STATES

- ▶ At year-end 2003, over 1 million women were in criminal justice custody, either in prison or jail, parole or probation in the United States. Over 101,000 women were incarcerated in state prisons—representing 6.9% of all inmates.
- ▶ The majority of women inmates are incarcerated for non-violent crimes such as drug offenses, public health and public-order offenses, or property offenses including larceny, burglary and fraud.
- ▶ The percent of female inmates in prisons or jails who report a history of physical or sexual abuse is up to eight times the percent of male inmates who report abuse.
- ▶ Nearly 23% of women inmates nationwide are identified as mentally ill compared to nearly 16% for men.
- ▶ 60% of women in prison were not employed full-time prior to their incarceration. Nearly 30% of women prisoners were receiving public assistance before arrest, compared to 8% of men.
- ▶ About 37% of women prisoners had incomes of less than \$600 per month prior to their arrest.

NEW YORK STATE

- ▶ As of January 1, 2005, nearly 2,800 women were incarcerated in New York State prisons, 4.5% of New York State's total prison population. Another 40,000 are on parole or probation.
- ▶ Female inmates are the fastest growing segment of the prison population; from 1973 (Birth of the Rockefeller Drug Laws) to 2004, the number of women in New York State prisons increased by approximately 760%—a rate of growth over one and a half times the ratio for men.
- ▶ Roughly 75% of women in New York State prisons are women of color: 50% are African American, almost 25% are Latina, and about 23% are white.
- ▶ A recent study of female inmates at New York's Bedford Hills Correctional Facility found that 82% of women prisoners had a childhood history of severe physical and/or sexual abuse and that more than 90% had endured physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes.
- ▶ 40% of women prisoners are incarcerated for drug offenses, almost 87% of whom are women of color. Over 85% of women in prison report having a substance abuse prior to arrest.
- ▶ Nearly 15% of women in New York's prisons are known to be HIV+, a rate of infection almost double the rate of male inmates (7.8%), and more than 100 times the rate in the general public. Female inmates also have high rates of hepatitis and tuberculosis.

THE COST OF INCARCERATION...THE COST TO THE TAXPAYERS

WAM served a woman in the Bronx who was a predicate, a second offender, arrested with 3 vials of crack (\$10 street value). The client's 5 children included a baby born while incarcerated. The judge had no choice under the law, sentencing her to 4 to 9 years in prison. The cost to the taxpayer boggles the imagination:

- One year spent at Rikers Island with a new baby: \$60,000
- One year foster care for 4 children @ \$20,000 per child: 80,000
- Three years upstate (mother) @ \$36,000 per year: 108,000
- Three years foster care for 5 children @ \$20,000 per year: 300,000
- Total cost to taxpayer \$548,000**

That figure does not take into consideration if the mother is released after four years on work release or parole, in which

case she will not be given custody of her children until a later date. If the foster care agency has the children evaluated and they are found to be "special" they could charge the taxpayer as much as \$55,000 per child per year and the cost could be doubled. Please keep in mind that the cost involves only one client, not the many others in the system.

If Mother was placed in a rehabilitation program

- 2 yrs residential rehabilitation program @ \$14,000 per year: \$28,000
- 2 yrs foster care for 5 children @ \$20,000 per child per yr: 200,000
- Total cost for a residential rehabilitation program: **\$228,000**
- Cost for imprisonment: (548,000)
- Saving to taxpayers for low-level drug offense \$320,000**

INPRISONMENT AND FAMILIES

- ▶ In the US, more than 6 million children have parents under correctional supervision (either in prison, jail, on probation or parole) including 2 million children of parents in prison. Nationwide 22% of minor children with a parent in prison are under five years old.
- ▶ As of January 2004, New York State prison inmates reported that they are parents to more than 85,000 children. Approximately 12,000 children have a mother incarcerated in a New York jail or prison.
- ▶ Nationally, more than 65% of incarcerated women are mothers of children under 18, and 64% of mothers in state prisons reported living with their children before prison. 1/3 of mothers lived with their children in the month prior to arrest. 1 in 5 children of incarcerated mothers witnessed their mother's arrest.
- ▶ Most children with fathers incarcerated in NY live with their mothers (88%), while most children of incarcerated mothers live with a grandparent (51%), or other relatives 23%. Eighteen percent of children with a mother incarcerated in New York live in non-kinship foster care.
- ▶ The cost of keeping a child in New York City foster care is between \$20,000 and \$55,000 per year.

“**I**For many inmates, children are a life-sustaining force. To break that bond is punishment of the worst kind.”

— RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY,
UN RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

IMPEDIMENTS TO MAINTAINING FAMILY TIES DURING INCARCERATION

- ▶ The incarceration of a care-taking parent often places children at an increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. They are also more likely to abuse substances, engage in other anti-social behaviors, and experience greater levels of anxiety, depression, attention disorders, aggression and poor scholastic performance. They also face the added trauma of being ridiculed by peers.
- ▶ The lifetime risk that children of incarcerated parents will end up in prison has been estimated between two and six times the average risk of their peers. A 1994 survey of children of offenders found that 41% of teenagers had been suspended from school and 31% had run-ins with the police.

“**S**eparating children from their mothers traumatizes children of any age and thwarts their successful development.”

— CHARLES HINES, BROOKLYN D.A.,
“PROSECUTOR SEEKS ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION”,
CRIMINAL JUSTICE, SPRING 2000

MAJOR PROGRAMS AND TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

In The Jails Acting as liaison between the client and her family, lawyer and community. WAM provides personal and family counseling along with assistance in emergency situations.

In The Courtroom WAM advocates, accompany and stand by the accused at arraignment, trial and sentencing. WAM explains the court processes and will make referrals to appropriate rehabilitation programs if agreed by all parties.

Telephone Hotline WAM accepts collect calls from the inmates at all facilities. Women will call to request help in contacting their attorneys, having someone help them get into a program, needing an advocate in court or just to ask WAM to locate their children or a family member.

Rikers Island Nursery Programs Through monthly workshops at the Rikers Island Nursery, WAM educates the new mothers as well as the pregnant women about their parenting responsibilities, and their legal rights regarding children in the custody of others. We also recommend mother/child residential programs on the outside when the courts permit.

Package Program Throughout the year WAM sends care packages to the women incarcerated at any one of the correctional facilities across the state, assuring them that, although they may lose contact with their family and friends, WAM is there for them.

Baby Showers WAM has baby showers for the various nurseries in the city and state facilities (Rikers Island, Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Taconic Correctional Facility) because the state and city do not provide clothing for the babies.

Mentoring Programs WAM has workshops to recruit mentors for newly released women. To be a mentor for a child you must be finger printed and screened to assure the safety of the child and be trained by Amachi/NY, a subsidiary of the New York City Mission Society. WAM training sessions for the adults will take place on Wednesdays at our office. Please call 212-683-3460 if you are interested in being a mentor.

Please Dare to Care

MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO:

WOMEN'S ADVOCATE MINISTRY, INC.

3 WEST 29TH STREET, SUITE 803

NEW YORK, NY 10001

Women's Advocate Ministry, Inc. is a 501©3 organization

www.womensadvocateministry.org

(212) 683-3460 • Fax: (212) 683-3490

Email: waminc@aol.com



WOMEN'S ADVOCATE MINISTRY, INC.

3 WEST 29TH STREET, SUITE 803

NEW YORK, NY 10001

(212) 683-3460 • (212) 683-3490 Fax
www.womensadvocateministry.org

Dorothy Tananbaum - President
Antonio McCloud - Vice President
Rita Zimmer - Treasurer
Rev. Marlene Jones - Secretary

Members

Precious Bedell
Diane Campbell
Rev. Dr. Robert D. Williams

Honorary Members

Dr. Dorothy Austin
Dr. Marion Blumenthal
Dr. Gail Furman
Hon. Jerome Marks
Rev. Sala W. J. Nolan
Rev. Dr. Florence W. Pert
Ruth-Ellen Simmonds
M. Delores Thrower

Rev. Dr. R. Elinor Hare - *Founder/President Emeritus*

Rev. Annie M. Bovian - Executive Director