

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
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WAM
WOMEN'S ADVOCATE MINISTRY

NEWSLETTER OF
WOMEN'S
ADVOCATE
MINISTRY, INC.
WINTER, 2006

Why We Must Listen

Recent newspaper articles and TV newscasts tell horror stories about children dying from abuse while in the custody of their guardians. At the time of their abuse, their guardians were supposed to be supervised by agencies that receive city, state and federal monies to keep our children safe. We see the headlines and lament the victims who have died, but do we realize what happens to some who live on after such abuse? If we care about the future of our society, we must listen to their stories.

As an advocate of incarcerated women, I talk to those who've lived on after heinous abuses. They are in the criminal justice system after being charged with crimes that boggle the imagination. When we view their cases it makes no sense to us why they did what they did. I can assure you, it makes no sense to us, but it does to them.

At the time of birth, no child chooses a life of crime. What happens from that day to the act that will turn their lives around forever? No one is born bad; only nurtured badly by those who have a hand in their nurturing process; albeit parents, guardians, or the system exercising authority in abusive situations. There is one way to stop and change that negative process. It begins with listening.

For years I've heard women "behind the walls" talk about childhood and the abuses they suffered, with no one to listen to them. Even as adults, they must feel safe enough to open up about their past. There are many different stories, but one common thread: "No one wanted to hear what I had to say". Their resulting anger manifested into anti-social behavior, and placed them on a dangerous slope. If no one cares about you, why care about yourself? In turn, why care about others?

There is a tendency for adults not to listen to children, especially when they tell us things we do not want to hear. We are quick to suspect exaggerations or lies because it is easier to dismiss the problem rather than face it. We fear we may become too involved, or in some cases we fear for our own safety if we report an abuse. As a result the children must fend for themselves, many turning to gangs as they grow older. For them the gang may be the only "family"

they can find. And when the children's predator is their own guardian, joining a gang may seem the only way out.

"The typical female criminal traces her issues of social maladjustment to physical or emotional abuse suffered as a young girl. Abuse suffered as a juvenile is what historically leads females to their first interaction with law enforcement".*

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (July 2005) clearly states that not all victims of child abuse and neglect will experience behavioral consequences; however, child abuse and neglect appear to make the following more likely:

• **Juvenile delinquency and adult criminality.** A National Institute of Justice study indicated being abused or

neglected as a child increased the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent. Abuse and neglect increased the likelihood of adult criminal behavior by 28 percent and violent crime by 30 percent (Widom & Maxfield, 2001).

• **Alcohol and other drug abuse.** Research consistently reflects an increased likelihood that abused and neglected children will smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol, or take illicit drugs. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, as many as two-thirds of people in drug treatment

programs reported being abused as children (2000).

• **Abusive behavior.** Abusive parents often have experienced abuse during their own childhoods. It is estimated one-third of abused and neglected children will eventually victimize their own children (Prevent Child Abuse New York, 2001).

We hear many stories about childhood abuse which, when reported by the child, were ignored. One of our clients was nine years old when she, an aunt and two cousins were going to 34th street to shop. They lived in the Bronx and had to take the train. She was sleepy and dozed off. When she awoke, the train doors were open, and her aunt was walking on the platform with her cousins, leaving her behind. The train was about to close its doors. She screamed but her aunt ignored her. Luckily, a passenger held the door open. She

* Brown, Jack W., Ph.D., *The Female Inmate* - International Encyclopedia of Justice Studies, June, 2003



escaped, and ran to her aunt who slapped her so hard she was almost knocked out. The aunt said she left her on the train because she fell asleep. My client was only nine years old: she had no money and no way to get home. She was in her aunt's care because her own mother was an alcoholic. After telling a neighbor what her aunt had done the neighbor did not believe it. In fact, she said if it did happen, she got what she deserved. Thus began a raw introduction to abandonment, followed by years of neglect. My client grew up mistrusting adults, and found her refuge in crime for reasons of survival.

Countless stories of sexual abuse end up the same way. In many cases the children tell somebody what happened, but no one believes them. In some cases, they are actually punished severely. Is it any surprise that they end up angry and outcast?

At Women's Advocate Ministry we listen and try to con-

sole the women once they have decided to come to grips with their pain. Unfortunately, we hear the stories after their incarceration. We cannot reverse their issues or their charges but we can help them move forward. By respecting their story, we dignify them, so they may find dignity within themselves. How much better if someone had listened to begin with!

It is imperative for us to hear those in danger. It can begin with being attentive to a child's cry for help, and insuring that our protection agencies truly do what they are supposed to do. It can happen in the corrections system right now, with even one person listening to the voice of one prisoner. It can be done. It needs to be done. Or everyone will pay the price. That is why we must listen.

—Reverend Annie Bovian, Executive Director

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

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.

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.

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.

“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

“Separating 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