

Incarcerated Women, former female offenders,
Carnegie Mellon Students,
Lydia's Place, and Photography . . .



Working Together

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Our course by Charlee Brodsky | : what we did |
| Our class members | : who we are |
| Our women | : who they are and our teams : an interview with Karen : an interview with Donna |
| Messages from our women | : to other women : to family members |
| Drawings of our women by Jason May | |
| Mother’s Voice by Samantha Simmons | : <i>Nice to meet you...</i> My first time at Mother’s Voice |
| People who make a difference | : Jimmy Gregg : Jan Scholl : Carol Haley |
| Statistics relating to children | |
| Reflections at the semester’s end | : by the students : by the instructor |
| A letter to Karen, from Dan | |
| Photographs of our experiences | |

Our Course

What we did

by Charlee Brodsky

Lydia’s Place is a nonprofit social service agency in Pittsburgh, whose mission is to “help female offenders and their children in Allegheny County rebuild their lives.”

Our course, *Lydia’s Place — using photography to strengthen ties between incarcerated women and their children*, involved a group of eleven Carnegie Mellon University students, working with about eight women who were clients of Lydia’s Place. As clients of Lydia’s Place, these women had or were serving time in jail.

As written in the course title, we wanted to use photography ‘to strengthen ties between incarcerated women and their children.’ Unfortunately, we did not have opportunities to work with children. We tried to connect with two families with children at home but phone calls were not returned. Next year if I offer this course again, I will make a strong effort to bring children of incarcerated parents into our project with permission from their guardians. These are children who are living with relatives at best, or are in foster care, or in group homes. These children are statistically ‘at risk’ to become offenders like their parents. These children deserve to be nurtured, properly cared for, and loved. Because we didn’t connect with children, it is more accurate to say that we explored how photography could be used to help female offenders in their recovery and in their lives.

All of the women we worked with were mothers. Some were mothers in their twenties; some were grandmothers. Mary, one of our women, had three sons in jail. Although this situation seemed extreme to us, having close relatives in jail was not unusual for many of these women.

All of the women we worked with committed crimes because of their addictions. Of the women who Lydia’s Place works with, 98% have addiction problems.

Our course was project-based. Because our semester started before the support group convened, it was a few weeks before we met the women and made any photographs. We took advantage of this time. We examined issues that landed these women in jail and discussed our own reasons for taking this course. Some of us have addiction in our families and one of our classmates experienced her father’s incarceration for addiction when she was growing up. Others took the class because it was different than learning from books. We invited Mr. Jimmy Gregg, an amazing octogenarian who was an assistant warden at ACJ, to come to our class to talk about his long career in corrections during which he saw generations of family members move in and out of the facility. He told us about the “Reality Tour” started a few years ago where a drug overdose is staged at the jail in front of an audience of young people complete with a post mortem at the morgue. Also, he told us about the sports programs he created to keep young people away from drugs and out of jail, and how these programs also help to keep drugs out of neighborhoods. We also toured the jail. Walking through the cold, hard halls, seeing the bars, seeing everyone dressed alike with somber expressions made jail life real for us.

On a cold Thursday night, it was finally time to attend our first of seven support group meetings. Going into the building, we wondered how the women would react to us; we wondered how we would react to the women. Our meeting was awkward at first, but as soon as cameras came out, ours and the disposable cameras given to the women to use, any ice melted. The women loved posing and being in front of the cameras, and we gladly gave them the attention they adored. Many of the women were living together at Surrender House, a home that helps women in their transition back to regular life. The women’s relaxed warm style, the cushy sofas, the pretzels and chips... it all helped the students relax. Comfortable with themselves and with each other, the women welcomed us into their lives. They didn’t seem like hardened criminals. After initial conversation about what we wanted to accomplish over the next seven weeks, we chose partners and then worked in pairs. We started with a group activity and then a student and a female offender went off to talk and make photographs together. This would be our model for the next seven weeks. We were two groups of people, from very different backgrounds — CMU students and women trying to live ‘clean and sober’ — making connections through photography.

In our Friday morning class sessions, we asked ourselves difficult questions. *‘Why should we care about jailed women?’; ‘Why do women stay with bad men?’; Is addiction a crime or a disease?’; How do you stay ‘clean and sober’ in unhealthy environments?’; How does a felon get a job? How do you explain addiction to those who don’t have cravings?’* When we photographed the Mother’s Voice program, we wondered how the children would react to seeing their mothers in jail uniforms. We debated how much to PhotoShop the photographs. *Should we ‘clean up’ a mother’s bruised arm and stains on her uniform if that photograph is for that child?* And we even asked if we should PhotoShop out the woman’s uniform. As weeks passed and we spent more time with with our women, we continued to question but found few answers. We knew that jail populations were growing, that addiction numbers were growing too, and that these societal problems were not going away. We also probed our own feelings about difficult life issues and we began to see aspects of our own lives more clearly. We certainly saw our privileges in comparison to our women who had little financial means and less education. But we saw, too, that these women enjoyed and appreciated each other, were thankful for being ‘clean and sober’, and took pride in themselves. We saw them as individuals; not as faceless statistics. We saw their strengths. We saw them as mothers who cared about their kids. We saw them as women who lived hard lives for many reasons. We hoped that they would make it back to their families and that we, with naivete or not, wanted to help them in the process.

Every week we brought photographs to give our women. We’d bring in large contact sheets for the women to cut up. When we saw tangible disappointment on a women’s face when she didn’t find images of herself, we made sure to take plenty. The women delighted in seeing themselves in pictures. In our own lives of ubiquitous camera phones and digital point and shoot cameras, everyday photographs of ourselves mean less to us than to them. Few of these women had cameras and they certainly didn’t have computer monitors to download photographs to.

My students, from different part of the campus, were not photography majors. Nor did they represent any particular niche at the university. In terms of their studies, the arts, humanities, and sciences were represented. At one point late into the semester, I realized that almost all of one of my student’s photographs were blurry. I never went over camera mechanics with these students and assumed that none were beginners. In fact, in class we hardly ever had in-depth discussions about the aesthetics or the ‘how-tos’ of photography. We didn’t talk about what raised the standards of the photograph from the snapshot to an image with more meaning. But in defense of this lack, I felt that the end product was less about the good photograph and more about a relationship between a student and a woman. The women delighted in almost all photographs of themselves. Their eyes were less critical than mine and they liked photographs for different reasons than me.

Our class — who we are

Our class met once a week for a fourteen week semester. In addition, we met the women at Lydia’s Place during their support group on seven Thursday evenings.



Samantha Simmons

I'm an Art major, concentrating in both photography and painting, and I'm also a track jock. The women seemed unwelcoming when I saw them as inmates in jail, but when I worked with them through Mother's Voice, I saw them as caring and fun people.



Jason May

I am a junior in Industrial Design. I love to draw and observe everything. I observe life and people. I want to share what I see with others.



Shoshana Vegh-Gaynor

I'm a senior History major. I really enjoyed getting to know the women. I was delighted by the friendships that I formed with the women and what I learned from them.



Jessica Chung

I'm a senior Psychology and Architecture minor. I like seeing how people with different backgrounds communicate with each other.



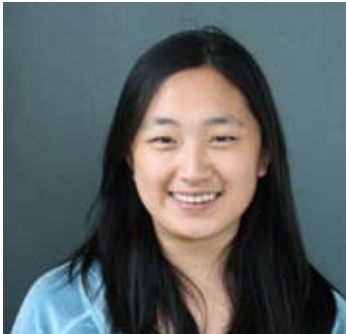
Jonathan Scholl

I'm a grad student at Heinz College and will have my master's in Health Care Policy & Management this May. I like to work with people. In this class I was able to work with people who are affected by my research. Next year I plan to go to medical school.



Brandy Wyant

I'm a recent alum who came to the first class to share my story of my father's incarceration. I kept coming back because the class really spoke to my sense of concern for others. A lot of courses talk about helping others; this one actually reaches out.



Brigit Cong

I'm a master's student of Product Development. I learned a lot from this class. I empathize with those who are less fortunate than me.



Taylor Reynolds

I'm a junior directing student. Though I love making up stories and creating different worlds through theater, the real stories of people (especially these women) have really touched my life.



Soyoung Park

I'm a senior Math major. I've learned a lot from the women. They have a lot to tell. I can see myself more clearly now.



Dan Lim

I'm a senior Statistics major and I'm the worst photographer in the class. I enjoyed taking smokes with the women. We got along



Sarah DeWath

I'm a senior Psychology major and Industrial Designminor. I'm also captain of the varsity soccer team. I really like working with kids and I especially care about those with obstacles to overcome.



Charlee Brodsky

I've taught photography at Carnegie Mellon for over thirty years. I love making photographs and I care about people.

Our women

Our teams



Mary and Taylor



Creola and Jason



Donna and Sarah



Melissa and Jon



Karen and Dan



Rachelle and Brigit



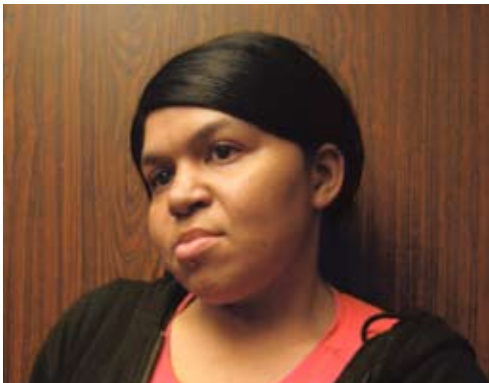
Amanda and Charlee



Kim and Shoshana



Mary Alice Upshaw



Donna Carlisle



Karen



Amanda Marie Triebisch



Creola Ousley



Melissa



Rachelle Taylor



Kim Locke

Messages to women

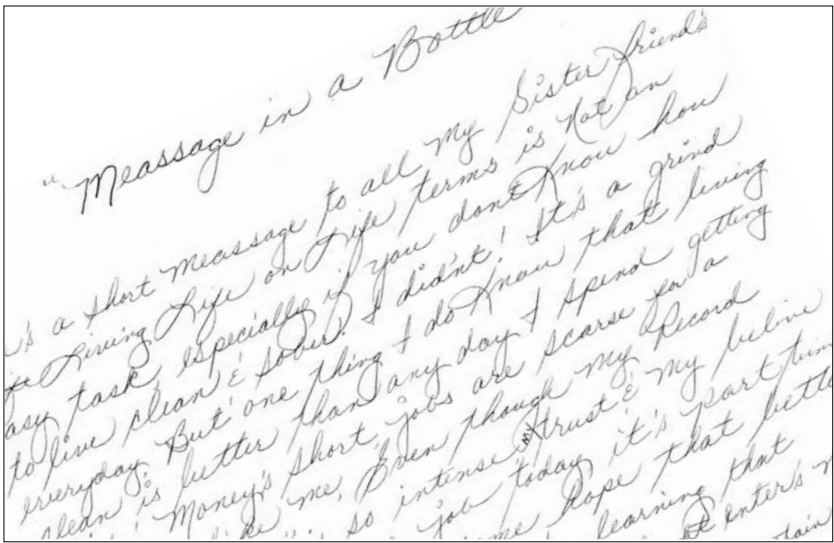
In our first support group with the women, I handed out paper and pens and asked the women to write something to other women; and also a message to their children. In both instances, they could interpret this as they liked.



Karen

Karen titled her writing, “Message in a Bottle.” The title creates an image of finding an unexpected gift at your feet. Karen’s message was about her hard learned life lessons that she wanted to share. Karen was teamed with CMU student Dan. She attended all of the support group meetings except the last one. This put Dan in a tizzy. He needed more information from Karen to finish his gift to her. Dan talked to Vicki to get Karen’s contact information. Vicki informed him that Karen is a repeat offender, often disappears, and may be back on the streets. Through our many weeks getting to know Karen, we learned that she likes to have a good time, she missed the excitement of New York, she has a daughter on dialysis, and that she felt she was at a good place in her life because she had a part-time job.

Karen wrote to her grand-daughter about what she wanted to do with photography during our time with Lydia’s Place: *“Nay, Nay, I’m starting a project at Lydia’s Place that I would like you to participate in with me. We’ll be taking pictures so that you, I, and your mom can have pictures together. The only pictures we have together is your graduation pictures. I would like you to have pictures to send Uncle Porky and Aunt Alice and Aunt Auntie and even Uncle Rennie. I’m looking forward to reconnecting with you and your mom once again.”*



Message in a bottle...

Here’s a short message to all my Sister friends. Living life on life’s terms is not an easy task especially if you don’t know how to live clean and sober. I didn’t! It’s a grind everyday. But one thing I do know is that living clean is better than any day I spend getting high! Money’s short, jobs are scarce for a female like me. Even though my record ‘criminal history’ is so intense, because of my trust and my belief in God I have a job today. It’s part time but it’s given me some hope that better days are coming today. I’m learning that there will be days when the thought enters my head that I want to get high. The important thing is that I don’t react. As long as I don’t pick up the first one, I’m giving myself a chance.

Karen



Mary

- ① Don't get caught up in drugs + alcohol.
- ② following the wrong people that you think is your friend.
- ③ Don't fall in love with the first man you meet.
- ④ Don't let any man move in with you until you get to know each other ~~for~~ for a while.
- ⑤ Don't have sex too soon with the first man you see.
- ⑥ Never put a man first before your children.

Mary Upsham



Melissa

Your past is NOT your potential. (heard at the Allegheny County fair)
Worrying is like a rocking chair - it gives you something to do but
GETS YOU NOWHERE!
The WILL of GOD will NEVER take you where the GRACE of GOD will not keep you.

Melissa



Amanda

Everything happens for a reason.
You can not change the past, but
You CAN change the future.

Time is valuable, even if you feel
stuck, use your time to work on
something!

You can't always get what you want,
but if you TRY sometimes you might
just find you get what you NEED! ^{The Rolling} _{stones}

You are beautiful no matter what!

Never say NEVER!

FATE will ultimately lead you to your
DESTINY!

You can't just sit around and wait, you
HAVE to ~~do~~ get up and do something!

No one can save You but You!

ALWAYS not forever

FUCK IT IS NOT AN ANSWER!

Be honest no matter what!

Ammonia*
Marie*
Julian*

Change of Life — 14 rules to live by

by Mary Upshaw
and Creola Ousley

1. Always love and respect yourself;
2. Start with prayer every morning and you will be blessed;
3. Learn to treat yourself sometimes, buy a dress or shoes;
4. Always put your kids first and the rest will come;
5. Pay your rent and do not party all the time;
6. Don't depend on a man for anything even if he has a good job;
7. Let a man know that you can depend on yourself knowing that God is on your side;
8. Don't get caught up in drugs;
9. Know what's keeping you strong;
10. Make sure the man is right for you before you spend your life with him;
11. Always search your heart first;
12. Make sure you're ready for kids;
13. Don't make drugs and alcohol the main part of your life;
14. Let go and let God.

Messages to children

Grandmoms Angles

To my baby I thank
God for all mine of
of Grandbabys everyday I
wouldn't know what to do
with out you in my life
I love you very much

To My GRADKIDS
I'm Here for you

Xzavier-

I love you with all of my heart. Everything I do is to get you back and stable. One day we'll talk and I can only hope you'll understand. I'm sorry for not being there right now to watch you grow, but this will all be worth it in the end.

I LOVE YOU

LOVE ALWAYS -
Mommy

Sincere, Shadee, Saivean + Stormy

Mommy loves you, + hasn't forgotten about you + one day we will be back together
love mommy

*Austin
-N-
faith

Im so sorry for all
the pain i've caused.

I love you both.

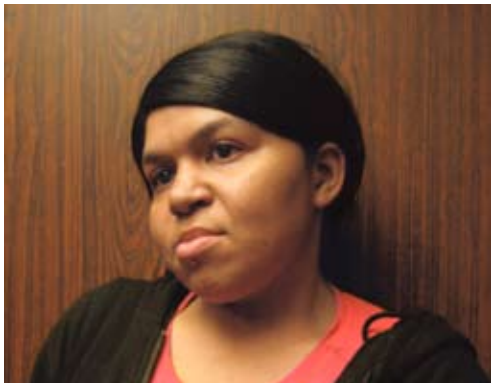
Please forgive me
and never give up
hope.

Love,
Mommy

I Love You
Love
Mom
&
Grandma

Interview with Donna

by Sarah DeWath



S: How long were you in jail?
D: Three months.
S: When was that?
D: May 1 to August 6.....of 2008
S: What was the most part about your time in jail?
D: Being there. Missing summer.

S: Donna, can you please describe your first night in jail?
D: I cried. I shouldn't have been there.
S: What do you mean you shouldn't have been there?
D: I didn't do it.
S: Do what?
D: The crime.
S: What crime was that?
D: Endangering the welfare of a child.
S: What does that mean exactly?
D: I have no idea. They just pinned it on me, they had nothing better to do.

S: How did you get to jail? Did the police come to your house to arrest you?
D: (Shakes head no) I turned myself in, they had a warrant out for my arrest.
S: Had the police summoned you?
D: Police came to my house and banged on the door.
S: Did you answer?
D: No, I didn't open the door, I was busy.
S: Were your kids there?
D: No, they were gone before that.

S: So when were your kids taken away?
D: Since October 6, 2007.
S: Did you get to see them? How often?
D: [I] used to see them twice a month.
S: Where do these visits happen?
D: Visits are at the CYF building. (pause) It's hard to be away from them.

S: When you went to jail, how did you feel? Were you angry? Sad?
D: I was sad...not angry.
S: And today? How do you feel?
D: Same.

S: What makes you happy?
D: What makes me happy? Myself. Playing the games on my phone. Searching for a job, coming here (Lydia's Place).

S: Donna, you said that you were in a group home when you were younger. Why? How did you get there?
D: That's a long story.
S: Is there a shorter version?
D: No, its long. Family problems, that's why.
S: How old were you?
D: Nine.
S: Until when?
D: Nine to eighteen.
S: And after eighteen? What happened? You turn eighteen and you're out on your own?
D: Pretty much. I was at Wells Tails.
S: What's that?
D: It's a place for homeless kids.

Interview with Donna, *continued*

S: Were you there the entire time?

D: O no.

S: No?

D: APA, Arabalee, Westley Ridgeview Treatment Center, Western Psychiatric, Mayview, New Castle Maximum Security, Wells Tails, Slayton Farms.

S: Eight. Wow, that's a lot.

D: I was at Western Psych first.

S: Western Psych?

D: Ya, it's a psychiatric institute. I got into a fight when I was nine years old.

S: Was your family in contact with you?

D: No. There was no contact when I was in the group homes.

S: Was that difficult?

D: It wasn't difficult, but life wasn't any easier.

S: What's the best thing for your kids?

D: To come home with me.

S: It must be difficult.

D: Me having my kids was the happiest moment in my life. Now I'm miserable. I'm putting my kids through the same thing I went through. My kids are traumatized. They don't even know who I am. I don't know who they are.

S: What are their personalities?

D: I don't know right now.

S: What about when they were babies? What kind of baby were they?

D: Sincere was calm and quiet. Saviean was a screamer. Shadee was wild and rambunctious. Stormy was a screamer, too.

S: It must be hard. Do you consider yourself a strong person?

D: I must be strong to go through all this.

*Next court hearing April 17, 2009

On April 17, 2009, Donna's parental rights to Sincere, Saviean, Shadee, and Stormy were terminated. The four young boys are currently dependents of the state, and are moving towards adoption options.

Interview with Karen

by Lauren Grant



“It’s like being on a merri-go-round, up and down, up and down.” —Karen’s daughter about the experience of having a mother who is a substance abuser.

Karen’s background:
53 years old;
Has a 33 year old daughter and an eleven year old granddaughter;
Daughter is a dialysis patient, and her treatment days were on the same days as visiting days, so she was never able to visit her mother in jail;
Was addicted 30 + years, but has been sober for 6 months;
Currently works a part-time job as a caregiver to a dialysis patient, and has been doing this only for a couple of weeks now (work is inspired partly by her daughter’s experience and partly by her desire to help people);
She feels that her age, her criminal history, and her lack of a work history are all barriers to her finding more adequate (full-time) employment: she says, “Even fast food places do a criminal check!”;
She feels that there is no help in jail – that programs come, but that they do not prepare you for the outside world: she says that she has graduated from every program available to her in the jail;
She is frustrated by her incarceration sentences in part because she says that so many things happened during this time that she didn’t want to occur and that she couldn’t control;
Her daughter was always saying to her, “Get your mind right!” and she ended up buying a shirt that read those words: she says that she could hear her daughters voice when she was in jail.

Describe your background.
I grew up in the projects. I’m the middle child – we’re all 5 years apart. I have a younger brother and an older brother. My mom was basically a single parent; my dad was an alcoholic. I love my dad – my dad was the fun parent. He would take us for ice cream, he always kept some time of hooptie, he would take us for rides. There were a lot of ups and downs, a lot of fighting. He died from Cancer and Scerosis, from alcoholism.

Describe your interests.
I like to read. I like to play cards. I like watching movies.

When did you begin abusing substances?
I don’t know...maybe when I was about 15. Me and my friends took acid and went to basketball games – it was the fun thing to do. It made me laugh. It was acid and pills when I was that young. As I got older, I started smoking reefa. In my 20s, I shot heroine, and in my late twenties I started free-basing. It made me feel good. As time went on, I couldn’t live without it. With heroine, you feel physically ill if you didn’t have it. There wasn’t ever a period when I wasn’t using.

In what way(s) did your behavior contribute to your incarceration?
I started committing crimes to get drugs – prostitution, then I started writing bad checks, doing credit card scams. I eventually got caught.

What were the durations of your sentences? Where did you spend your sentences?
I went to the penitentiary 3 times: 1 year, 6 months, and 6 months.

What was your time in jail like?
It was a blur. I really can’t remember a whole lot that happened. I knew that I had to complete a drug program the first time, The Wings of Life, if I wanted to come home, so I did that.

Questions that I didn’t get to ask:
How did your periods of incarceration impact your perception of yourself?
How did you spend your time during your periods of incarceration?
How did your periods of incarceration impact your family and friends and your relationships with them?
Did you feel any motivation to stay clean and to stay out of jail? If so, why?
What are you greatest regrets about abusing substances and your incarcerations?
What have you learned from you experiences?
What would you say to other women like you?
What would you say to your family and friends?
What suggestions would you make to policymakers and those in control of jails, halfway and three-quarter houses, and support programs?

Jason's drawings



Rachelle



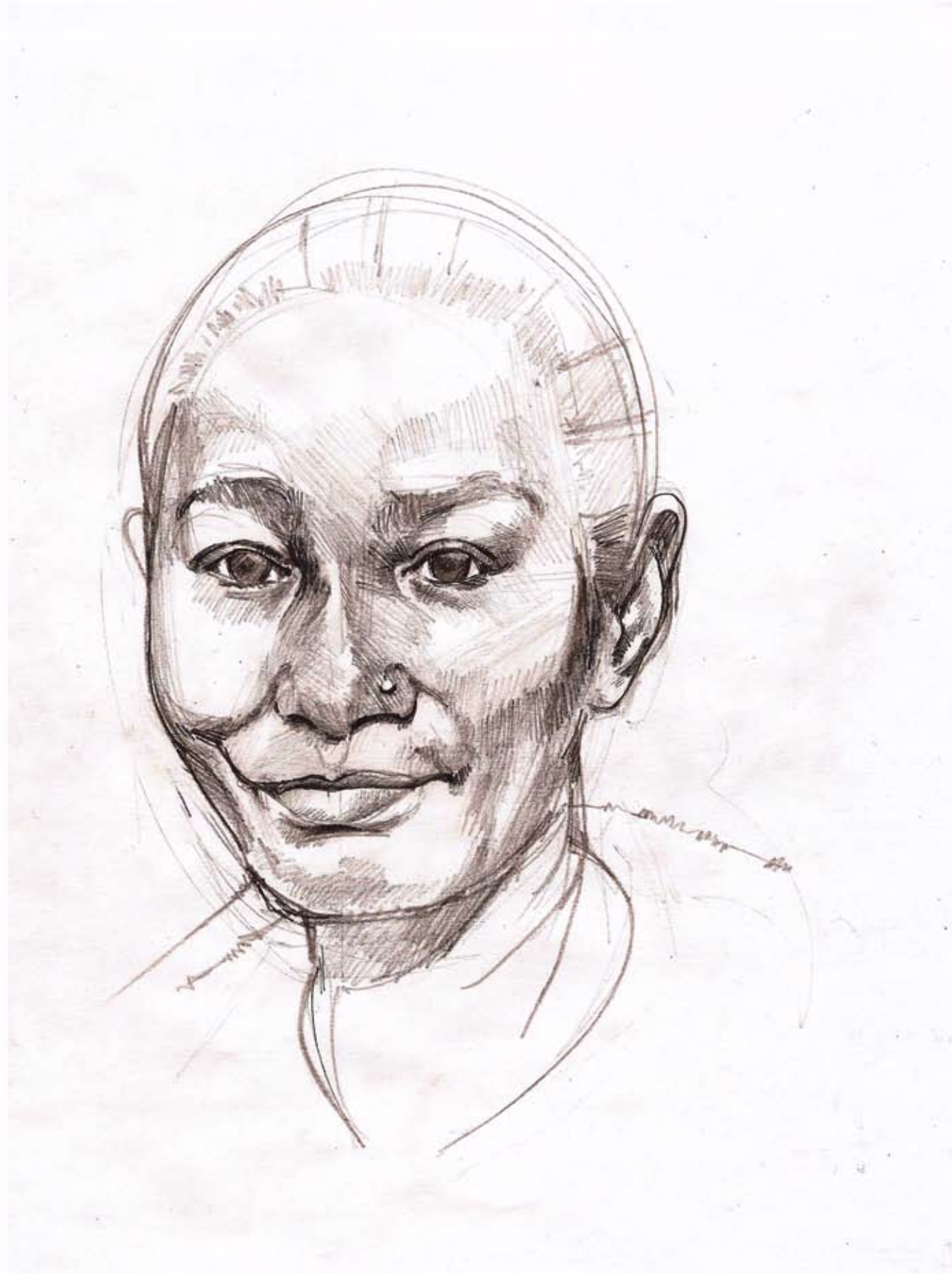
Melissa



Karen



Donna



Creola



Kim

Mother’s Voice

Mothers’ Voice is a special program that allows mothers, twice a month, to record books for their children. The books and tapes are sent to the homes of the children and although their mothers are absent from their lives, the children can hear their moms reading to them. The program was developed to strengthen the relationship between mothers while they are in jail, and their children. Participants say that children love reading the books along with their mother’s recordings; and that Mother’s Voice increases bonding and communication between mothers and children during this difficult time of separation.

Nice to meet you... my first time at Mother’s Voice

Story and photos by
Samantha Simmons



My first time going to the Allegheny County Jail for the Mother’s Voice program, I met a woman named Kelly. She came into the conference room, picked out a book for her children, sat down, stared at the cover, but never turned the pages. She was crying hysterically. She had been out of jail for the past three months after a sixth month stay due to crack cocaine possession, and now she was incarcerated again; this was only her third day back. Though clean for nine months, she was back in jail due to a violation of her probation. She was not allowed to call the father of her youngest child, but calls were made on her phone directly to him. She claimed she had been set up by her two ex-boyfriends, one the father of her two sons, and the other the father of her youngest, a girl. “He had me arrested in front of my kids,” she cried, “They were screaming and crying mommy. I had worked so hard to get them back and set an example, then he got me arrested in front of my boys!”

She could not be consoled, she felt like the world was against her and she couldn’t understand how if she was clean, spending time with her kids, and doing volunteer work, that she was still back in jail. She cried, “I don’t deserve this! If I’m in jail for doing the right thing, then might as well get high and go back to sticking needles in my arms!”

Antoinette, a social worker for Mother’s Voice, responded, “You know Kelly, my grandfather was a great person, he worked for this jail and started various programs to help the inmates get back on their feet, then died a painful death of pancreatic cancer. It’s not about deserve... Sometimes things just happen out of your control.”

Kelly stopped crying for a minute and thought about what Antoinette said. But just as soon as she stopped crying, she started again.

A couple of weeks later I went back to the jail and saw Kelly again. She looked at me with a smile, held out her hand, and said “Hi my name’s Kelly... nice to meet you.”







Suntina Harden, top left
Charlene Harris, top right
Abbie Swogger, bottom left
Bernita Ostrander, bottom right





People who make a difference

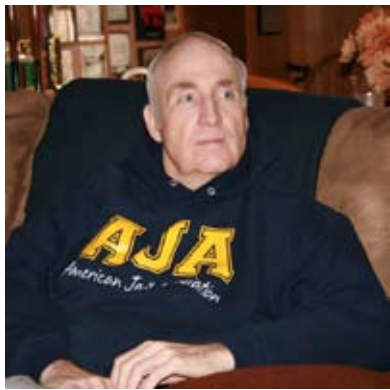
: Jimmy Gregg
Executive Deputy Warden, Allegheny County Jail, retired

: Jan Scholl
Staff Atorney, KidsVoice

: Carol Haley
Staff member, Lydia's Place

Jimmy Gregg

Executive Deputy Warden
Allegheny County Jail, retired



Interview
by Brandy Wyant

What was your daily life like as executive deputy warden? What were your responsibilities?

Basically I was head of operations, my main duties was to ensure that policies and procedures were being followed. I roamed the pod as the supervisor.

What kept you at the jail for so many years?

I had the desire; I liked the work. I enjoyed that type of work.

Did you enter law enforcement intending to see so much drug activity? Were you surprised with the number of drug users in jail?

92% of inmates were in for drugs or drug-related issues (i.e. stealing) according to the survey taken right before I left.

There were 300 inmates when I started at the old jail [in 1973], when I left there were 3000 inmates. I didn't expect to see that increase.

One success story?

I've seen a lot of success stories. I began the first GED program...back in the eighties.

To be able to see inmates direct themselves and be able to do that was rewarding.

I go to a lot of sporting events, and at the games I see a lot of ex-inmates. They come up to me and tell me how well they're doing. Children that I coached years ago have gone through [the jail] and they'll come up to me, and they're doing well.

One young boy about five years ago was a pretty good athlete, ran into some hard times... right now is a senior at Pitt and is going to graduate with a degree in Criminology. I've coached baseball and basketball for 38 years. Most of these kids on this wall have been successful, but three or four have passed away.

That's the reward from coaching: seeing these kids become successful - pillars of their communities – one is the head coach of the Green Bay Packers.

What have you done to help turn around the unsuccessful stories?

I and others in the community started Greenfield Organized Against Drugs, because of a young man, twenty-seven, that I coached years ago. We put him into a program, but he got into drugs, overdosed, and died.

We try to prevent young children from trying drugs...we target between the ages of 10 and 17 through the Reality Tour. That's the main focus of the organization.

Were the families of the inmates involved, did they visit, etc.?

Visits are a main component of jail. I would say 80% of inmates get visits, but not contact visits. It's hard when they're talking through the glass.

Some contact visits are available. depending on the security status of the inmate.

Did you see a difference between those with family and involvement vs. not?

Definitely; they have a good support group. You need that support group. We have support for them in jail, but once they leave jail, they need that support. Once they go out of jail, 70% return because they don't have that support outside.

Did you ever work with inmates with young children?

Right now they do have a program now- the playroom. I never worked with the children persee. I would get a lot of phone calls from [the inmates'] mothers and fathers.

What did the inmates' parents want to know?

They wanted to basically know how they're doing. - that they're getting the right medication, if they're on medication. - if somebody's having trouble on the pod. I had an open door policy...it was important that the people knew that somebody cared about what was going on [at the jail].

Jimmy Gregg, *continued*

Have you seen several generations (father, sons) in jail?

Numerous times over the years. A lot of times I'd stop and say, "I knew your father." You could tell by looking at 'em, who their father was.

What advice do you have for an inmate in regards to his family?

First of all, be more responsible. Especially if he has children, he has to be responsible.

What advice do you have for an inmate struggling with drug abuse?

My advice would be to try to get involved in some type of program to help correct the problem. AA/NA are in the jail; there's a lot of educational programs in the jail.

Are there more programs now than there used to be for drug addicts in jail?

Yeah, I think it's a business now for people. 20-30 years ago, it wasn't like that. It's a big business.

When did you begin Reality Tour and what prompted you?

In 2004, because of the death of that young man. [His] mother wanted to do something to eliminate some other parent having to go through the pain she went through. A local doctor and I were the ones that started that program.

We have served 1800 children on the Reality Tour in five years. We have three individuals – inmates - come down and talk to the children, to hear them speak about the wrong things they did. They're men and women in a therapeutic drug program... they spend eight to ten hours in class. These individuals are those that want help. Some of them are inmates I've known for 25 years...they're still in the system.

Describe the Reality Tour and some reactions you've seen from Tour-goers?

First phase: We show a movie...Heroin Kills. It's an aggressive movie. It shows parents crying and the person actually dying. From there we see the DA's office and show them how to identify drugs. The parents [on the Tour] are quite interested; it's a learning experience for them too. Then we walk through and observe the individuals in jail. Then they told how a strip search is conducted. The young individuals think, 'I don't want someone doing that to me.' We go up to [the jail's medical facility]. The doctor is working on some kid, and the kid passes away. The doctor pulls a sheet over the kid. The mother and dad, who are also actors, come in. The father's holding the kid's baseball glove... There's not a dry eye in there. It's quite effective...doesn't only affect the children, it affects the parents. Then I give the final talk...'Look, you're not only hurting yourself, you're hurting your parents too.'

What would you say to someone who said, "Scare tactics don't work"?

[The Reality Tour] isn't a scare tactic like Scared Straight is. I did that at the old jail. I got the biggest, roughest, meanest inmate I could find and told them, 'If the deputy warden wasn't here, you'd be in trouble right now.'

I bring my whole basketball team down there, and they're all good kids. We're not trying to scare them; we're just trying to show a little reality.

[Scared Straight] was the element of fear, this is the element of reality.

I had a couple kids that wanted to keep coming, month after month. They liked it, liked being around the jail. I thought, this isn't to be liked, it's to teach them a little reality.

What else needs to be done?

You need programs...programs are important in any type of institution. These young individuals don't have family support, but that can't be an excuse...a lot of people don't have family support. You just lock 'em up and throw the key away, when you let 'em out they're going to do the same thing they did before.

Jan Scholl

Staff Attorney, KidsVoice



Interview by Jon Scholl

What is your occupation and what does it entail?

I am a staff attorney at KidsVoice. I represent dependent children in court. Once a dependency petition is filed the court appoints KidsVoice to act as guardian ad litem for the child. I advocate in court for the best interests of the child. Sometimes the child’s interest is served best by remaining with their parents or if the child has been removed from their parents, reunification may be in the child’s best interest. However, sometimes the child’s interest is best served by placement with a fit and willing relative, other permanent placement or even a termination of their parent’s rights leading to adoption of the child.

Why did you decide to work at KidsVoice?

Before I started at KidsVoice, I was an assistant district attorney. I was in the Appellate Unit and the individuals I dealt with were convicted claiming some kind of trial error or ineffective assistance of counsel or some kind of constitutional rights violation. As an assistant district attorney, the feelings of the criminals were not important to me. I had developed an extremely hard edge. Most importantly, I began to think about the children of these convicts and wondered how they could possibly be ok. I knew they were “at risk”. I began to volunteer at the Pittsburgh Project tutoring at an after-school program. My undergraduate degree is in education and I believed the work at the after-school program would provide balance to my hard edged appellate work, which it did. I looked forward to connecting with the kids in the after-school program. However, back at the unit, after reading one horrific trial transcript of a crime against a ten month old baby – I knew I did not want to set my eyes on this convict. My thoughts turned more and more to the kids of the criminals and the young innocent victims at the hands of these criminals. My heart ached for the kids. I knew of KidsVoice and knew I wanted to be a part of their mission. It was time to leave the DAs office

What was one successful reunification story?

Diontae was 5 years old in August 2006 when he was removed from his mother’s care and placed with his great aunt because of the mother’s drug use, mental health issues, lack of housing and lack of parenting skills. At the time mother admitted to daily marijuana use and occasionally crack cocaine, In January 2007 the mother was in a drug program but was discharged because she did not call in when required, she missed group sessions and she had a dirty urine for marijuana. The aunt would not agree to adopt Diontae or be a long term placement as Diontae cried for his mother. The aunt held out hope and provided support to enable Diontae and his mother to reunite. In October 2007, the mother continued to cite various “clean dates” as she relapsed often. Her last relapse for marijuana was August 2008. Aunt continued to report that Diontae would cry after each visit with his mom because he wanted to remain with her. She also reported that Diontae did not want to see his father. In January 2008, mother really began to make great strides. She was attending NA meetings and providing documentation, she completed POWER drug rehab. In June 2008, mother obtained appropriate and safe housing. The court finally permitted Diontae to visit unsupervised with his mother and to progress to overnight visits if the mother’s urines remained clean and she remained compliant with her aftercare program. But in August 2008, mother relapsed on marijuana.

What was one unsuccessful reunification story?

TaVon always wanted to be returned to his mom. The goal was reunification. TaVon and his younger sisters were removed in 2002 because of the mom’s drug use and alcohol abuse - leading to severe neglect. TaVon was 10 years old at the time. Today he is 16 and living in a residential children’s facility. He attends the grounds school. The mom’s parental rights regarding other children were terminated years ago. The father has been incarcerated for as long as this case has been open. The mom was determined to not lose all her children, and at the very least, she wanted to get her daughters back. She did everything the county wanted her to do regarding housing and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The girls were eventually reunited with their mom. The mom’s home was large and she had room for TaVon. TaVon came to the court hearing at Christmas 2007 in his finest outfit - fully expecting to be reunited with his mother and sisters in time for the Holidays. He was not. Mom stated she could not have him at this time. As it turned out, once mom was reunited with the girls ,

Jan Scholl, *continued*

she dropped out of TaVon’s life. She never attended the family therapy. It was devastating. But TaVon went on and excelled in the residential programs. His permanency goal was changed from reunification to other permanent living arrangement. Mom was in agreement with the goal change. TaVon eventually let go of his dream that he would be reunited with his mother and sisters. He works at the facility and earns a paycheck. He is 16 years old now and wants to live in a foster home - or - if no one will have him - then in a semi-independent group home. TaVon is now working on his transition plan. It does not include his mother. *(Note - Recently the county was contacted by TaVon’s sisters who reported mom was drunk all the time, screaming abusive hurtful things at them and hitting them. An investigation is in progress)

What is the most common issue/problem that the mothers of your clients face?
Mothers of my clients have a myriad of problems, but often the underlying problem is drug crack/ heroin addition.

Why do you think so many women succumb to your answer from the previous question?
That is hard question to answer, but often the mothers themselves were not raised in a strong, supportive and stable family environment. Often mom was raised in a home where father, brother or uncle was incarcerated. Also, even if the home was stable and drug use was not tolerated, once she stepped out onto the street – there is a whole different set of expectations. The expectation to use was stronger than the expectation to not use.

What are the barriers that mothers face while maintaining a relationship with their children while incarcerated or in recovery?
While mom is incarcerated, the physical separation can be very hard for both the young child and older child. Just not being there when the child returns from school or getting ready for bed or eating a daily meal together, or just talking about the day - can put emotional distance between mom and child. Moreover, whether or not it is in the child’s best interest to visit in the facility where mom is incarcerated is something that we would consider in our advocacy. Sometimes the parent would rather not visit because they do not want the child to see them incarcerated. While mom is in recovery, more often than not, visits with children remain supervised which can act as a barrier to natural bonding and interaction.

Do you think the age of the child effect the mother’s ability to maintain a relationship during this time?
I think it is hard for mother to maintain a relationship no matter what the age of the child is. It is very difficult at age 2, 12 or 17. The younger child needs more of the physical touch/ hugging and bonding with mom. The older child needs more of the emotional connection with mom. Often the older child is angry at mom and may shut down and choose not to develop the relationship with mom until mom “gets her own act together”.

In the cases that you have seen how much effort does the mother put forth to maintain a healthy relationship with her child through these difficult times? How receptive are the children with maintain a relationship with their mother who is having personal problems?

Most of the mothers have serious addiction problems. It takes all their effort to stay clean and crime free. I don’t think maintaining a healthy relationship with their children is the priority at this point in the mom’s life, but it should be. It is just as important as staying clean. Mom cannot assume that the relationship with her child will be there when “she gets out”.

Jan Scholl, *continued*

Even through those really hard times, it is important for the child to know that mom loves them - and if she can not be with her child – at least a daily phone call to say good night, I love you, I am in recovery and I am working hard – would be helpful. The older children that I represent would be very receptive to maintaining a relationship with their mother who was having personal problems – if that child knew that their mother was sincerely working to overcome her problems – and if mother was consistent in reaching out to the child.

Why do you think some mothers are able to maintain a relationship with their children through these troubling times while other mothers are not?

I think the mothers that are able to maintain a relationship are able to do it because they make it a priority.

How difficult is it to see when the children wants a relationship with their mother, but the mother makes no effort to make that a possibility?

It is heartbreaking.

From your experiences what advice do you have for mothers that want to maintain a relationship with their children while incarcerated and recovering?

“Consistently call your children daily, tell them you love them, tell them they are good, ask about their lives, focus on them but don’t lecture them – and quietly recover.”

Carol Haley

Staff member, Lydia’s Place



by Vicki Sirockman

At the first support group meeting that we attended, Charlee posed a question to Vicki. She asked, “Of the women in this room, how likely is it that they will become repeat offenders?” Vicki replied pointing to Carol Haley, “If they have contact with that woman, 85 to 90% of them will be okay.”

About Carol Haley in Vicki’s words:

Carol Haley is our Director of Women’s Programming. She has held this position for eighteen months. She had worked at Lydia’s Place from 2002-2003. She left for two years to head a halfway house program for Pyramid Health Services and then returned to Lydia’s Place in late 2006.

Carol is charged with teaching classes focused on life skills and prison re-entry for the women at the Allegheny County Jail. She is also responsible for case management services for women as they leave jail, here in our office. Carol counsels women and helps them find substance abuse treatment, housing, employment, and physical and mental health services. Our parenting worker who assists Carol, focuses on helping women regain custody of their children.

Carol has superb outcomes when she works with our clients. Last year she worked with 119 women here in the office after they were released from jail. She meets most of her clients in the jail as she teaches classes. Last year, 100% of Carol’s clients found a stable source of income; 80% of these women found a job. Ninety-four percent found stable housing. 89% of her clients did not return to jail after one year. One hundred percent of our clients report substance abuse histories. Of these, 94% received substance abuse treatment. Eighty-nine percent reported mental health problems, and 94% received mental health treatment. Sixty-six percent of our clients had children under age 18. Of these women 37% regained custody and 44% were working to get their children back by year’s end.

One of the reasons Carol is so effective as a counselor is probably because she, herself, had substance abuse problems as a younger woman and was incarcerated on two occasions. She has successfully solved her own addiction problems, pursued a graduate degree in counseling, and is very well known and active in the Pittsburgh Narcotics Anonymous community. Her success serves as inspiration for many of our clients at Lydia’s Place.

Statistics relating to children

- Most of the 35,000 adults arrested in Allegheny County last year are parents. And so are most of the 20,000 men and women who went to jail.

Source: Jane C. Burger, President – Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, From Advocating for Children of Prisoners Second Report to the Community, 2006

- 25 percent of mothers and 13 percent of fathers at the Allegheny County Jail were, when arrested, the sole caretakers of children under 18.
- More than two million American children have at least one parent in jail or prison.
- 10 million children have experienced the incarceration of one or both parents.
- The number of parents in prison has risen more than 400 percent since 1970 and continues to rise.
- In Allegheny County alone, 7000 children have a parent in jail or prison.
- Of children with parents in the Allegheny County Jail, 50 percent are white and 50 percent are African American.
- Three-quarters of these children are under 13; their average age is 8. (See above statistic.)

Source: Advocating for Children of Prisoners, First Report to the Community, March 2005

- 70% of children who were present at a parent's arrest watched that parent being handcuffed
- 30% were confronted with drawn weapons (See above statistic.)
- 3 in 100 American children will go to sleep tonight with a parent in jail or prison.
- One in eight African American children has a parent behind bars.
- Nearly three quarters of those admitted to state prison have been convicted of non-violent crime.
- Of every dollar spend on drug abuse and its consequences, only four cents goes to prevention and treatment.
- Half of all children with incarcerated mothers are cared for by grandparents.
- Nearly two thirds of children being raised by single grandmothers live in poverty.
- Prisoners who have regular visits are six times less likely to reenter prison than those who have none.
- More than 60 percent of parents in prison are held more than 100 miles from home.
- Only 6 state child welfare systems have a policy in place to address the needs of children of incarcerated parents.
- 1 in 10 children of prisoners will be incarcerated before reaching the age of 18.

Source: Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights, San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership (SFCIPP)

Student reflections at the semester’s end

Jessica Chung

I am sitting still looking at the screen of my computer and thinking to myself that time flies fast and everyone moves on.

To some people, hours, minutes, and seconds come together as a healing, yet to some people, time just does not seem to mend our broken pieces of heart or whatever.

Everyone carries a side of pain that is not to be revealed to others, keeping it inside, holding in, and not knowing how to go on – just powerless.

But these women come from different backgrounds and families, with different stories to tell, knowing how to laugh with good heart and share warmth with one another. They were the strongest and the most beautiful women that I have ever met, and I was impressed every single minute I had spent with them. From what I saw, they knew how to make jokes and laugh together, how to open up and share pain and stories of their own.

For a long time before I met them, I felt myself sinking down, powerless in my own situations and problems and future. I used to be very proud myself when I write, but it had been awhile since I stopped writing. And, I met them, and I started writing again. Those women became the stimulator and motivator in my life, helping me to return to my original self that used to love being poetic and pondering about life and speaking through words.

In the beginning, I had cognitive dissonance of ever doing this project with women as them, for I thought of them as weak, powerless, and broken. It was not a long time until I realized that they were stronger, more powerful, and more resilient. They radiated with light of hope and persistence that made them beautiful.

I still cannot forget tears shedding in their eyes when the head director of Lydia’s Place visited one day and gave speech about clouds and rainbows that we got to stay under the sky to finally find a rainbow at the end of a cloud. After hard times, these women still have good and pure hearts that showed ever potential of mending into one whole piece again. That fact confirmed the purpose of my life, for I have been holding onto a piece of hope that there are good hearts still remaining in this impure world.

Whatever it has become, I am glad that I started this project with these women and I am still in deep thoughts of significant meaning behind this all. I just cannot grasp all of the significances right now, because there are so many.

Jonathan Scholl

I learned about this class during the second week of class of the semester. As soon as I learned about the focus of the class and possible impact that this class can make in other people’s lives, I knew that I had to try my best to add the course, even if it meant introducing myself to the professor in the UC turn around and asking her if I could add the course. Coming from a science background, I have done research developing a biosensor protein that could be used in asthma patients. However, all of my time was spent in the lab and I never actually got to meet or see the effects of my work on an asthma patient. This class gave me the unique opportunity to interact with the people who my work is benefiting. We were able to see the smiles on the women’s faces as we brought them our latest pictures. The relationships and connections made with the women at Lydia’s Place through this class has exceeded all of my expectation.

Most of the students in the class were pair with a specific mother at Lydia’s Place and I was paired with a mother named Melissa. She was very easy to talk to and we had a lengthy conversation when I first meet her. It seemed as though she just wanted someone to listen to her story and I was glad I could fulfill that role. She has two children who she loves very much. She loves talking to them on the phone and would often call them from Lydia’s Place. She has made mistakes in her life and is sorry for putting her family through things that they did not deserve. She is worried that the relationship with her son is loosening over the past

Jonathan Scholl, *continued*

year. She is at Lydia's Place because she is ready to make a change in her life. At first Melisadid not want any photographs taken of her. However, after our second visit, she opened up and allowed me to photograph her. We took pictures inside and then went outside to take picture with natural lighting. I am glad that I have the opportunity use the pictures that I took to help her strengthen her ties to her children and find strength through my projects that I am currently working on.

Many classes at CMU are extremely rich with information and at the end of the class the students gain a wealth of knowledge. However, very few classes allow the students to actually help others at a time when they need it the most. I am so fortunate that I was able to take this class before I graduate next month.

Shoshana Vegh-Gaynor

When I look back on the entire course of this semester, it really is astonishing to me to think about everything that I have experienced. At the beginning of the semester, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. When I signed up for the class, all I knew was that it would include photography and we would be working with incarcerated mothers and children in some way. I spent the first couple of weeks of the class still apprehensive that this was the right class for me. Although Charlee had only positive things to say about the support group, the idea of partnering up with a complete stranger made me a little uncomfortable. Additionally, not only were we to try and bond with a complete stranger, it was a complete stranger who I did not expect to have anything in common with. The day of the first support group, I was a little nervous. I had no idea what to expect, and although Charlee said that once the cameras came out people started to bond, I was not convinced that it would be that easy. Once we got there, however, things were not so bad. The women in the support group were extremely friendly, and it was true that once we started photographing and talking about photography it gave us all something to talk about. Soon after this first meeting we were paired off into groups, and I was paired with a woman named Kim. My first impression of her was that she was rather quiet. I had no idea what we would talk about, especially since I am also a little quiet, and I was not sure that our personalities would mesh. However, as the weeks went by, we found ourselves just talking about things, from the weather to how our lives were going. I found out that in fact Kim is not a shy person at all. She loves to talk and laughs often. To me, at least, she seemed to be an upbeat person. I really did enjoy getting to know Kim. I think that the moment when I realized that I really did feel comfortable around Kim was a moment when neither of us were talking. However, the silence did not feel strained, but rather just like the comfortable silence that can only be achieved with someone that you know.

Overall, I am not sure if I changed anyone's life through my photography. I may have given Kim something through giving her the photographs, but I highly doubt that I made a deep lasting change. However, what this project ultimately came down to for me was just the real life evidence that two people from completely different walks of life can find things in common and bond over it. I think that this in itself was an important lesson for me, and possibly for Kim as well. I really had a great experience, and I feel like I am going to come away from this class with an experience that really means something to me and is very unique.

Finally, as far as the project goes, I think that it is also very meaningful. The final project is more important than something traditional like a paper or an exam could ever be. I know that I have to invest time in this final project because it is not just a paper that no one will ever read again, but it is something that will hopefully Kim will appreciate and like. I really am looking forward to giving it to her, and especially to seeing her look at all the pictures of her that are in the book-one of her favorite things to do at support group.

Sarah DeWath

When I began this class I was interested in learning the skill of photography matched by my passion of working with children. I was interested specifically in the children's well-being and how photography could support this. Although working with Lydia's Place through out the semester never yielded any contact with the children, I was able to reevaluate my reason for taking the class. The majority of the students in the class were paired with a special woman at Lydia's Place to learn about her story.

Over the course of the semester I spent my time talking to a young woman named Donna who was a mother of four young boys. When I initially met Donna she was scheduled the next day for a court hearing to discuss her visitation right for her children. From the start I knew that Donna's story was a hard one to tell. She opened up to me about her childhood and foster-care since the tender age nine years old. Throughout her childhood she moved to and from nine different group homes. Donna's story is a hard one to tell and a hard one to listen to. I could not help but to empathize with the situation Donna had to confront throughout her life.

Reflecting upon myself I realized the opportunities that I have been so lucky to have. More than ever I realize the power of a situation can become greater than the individual within it. This class has taught me to realize that we can all be victim to a situation and an enemy to ourselves.

Reflecting upon this semester I realized these special dynamics that each individual plays within the world. Although many of the women at Lydia's place did not necessarily always make the right choices, several of the women seem that they are trying to become better for themselves, for their family and for the citizens of our world. We can not choose the situation we grow up in but we can decide what type of person to be. The women at Lydia's Place could be anyone we know and having their stories shared with me has been a realization of the trust of these women instilled within each of us. They want to be heard, they need to be heard, and the way society perceives these women needs to be changed.

So Young Park

The experience of meeting new people with different pasts has always allowed me to learn more about myself as well as the world around me. This is one of the reasons that I decided to study in the states. In that way, I thought I could meet more people with different backgrounds and share different thoughts and cultures. Although it definitely influenced on shaping who I am right now, I did not have many chances to spend time and meet different people outside the school.

When I first decided to take this course, I did not have much idea what I would do in this class. I guess I was just prepared to take pictures, like I have always been doing with my friends.

After the first several classes, I was nervous and anxious since I figured that this course consists of not just simply taking pictures, but interacting with people I haven't met. However, now I am glad that I stayed in this course and met women at Lydia's Place.

First time I went to Support Group, I had no clues what I was supposed to do. So, I took out my camera and started to take pictures of them. Not long after starting to take pictures, my anxiety and nervousness were gone. They were very welcoming and friendly. On the first visit, I could speak with some of them, and learn a little bit about them. Although the conversation we had on the first day was pretty short, I was thrilled to know them better.

At first, I really wished to help them tell their stories and connect them to their family more closely through photography. However, every time I went to support group and listened to their stories, I started to think about my life and what is really important for me. Women at Lydia's Place seemed to be very determined and goal-directed. They know their

So Young Park, *continued*

strengths. They know what they really want to know, and what they really like. Personally, I think most of CMU students spend their time to study for exams, assignments and projects. I have always rushed myself to finish my project on time at CMU. Women at support group helped me realize that I have never actually thought about me at all.

One day at Support Group, Charlee Brodsky asked women, “Tell me three things that you like about your self, and tell me three things that you don’t like about yourself.” As soon as she asked, they came up with lots of things that they like about themselves. And, one of them said, “Well, I can’t find anything that I don’t like about myself.”

After Support Group, I asked myself the same question, and I came up with many things that I don’t like about myself, but not single definite answer for what I like about myself. From that day, I tried to look inside me and am still trying to find it. I was amazed with their positive reflections on themselves and their constructive spirits.

Through the photography, we could hear many stories about their pasts as well as their thoughts and views on the world. They love their family members, especially grandchildren. They have a lot to tell to other women. They seemed to have learned a lot from their past experience. Their pieces of writings always touched my heart. Time to time, I went to support group when I was exhausted and stressed out due to workloads. However, I could forget everything that I need to do for tomorrow, and enjoy spending time with women. I could learn a lot from their stories and writings, and I really wish to share them with more people.

We all have dreams and hope deep inside us. Although sometimes we face troubles and obstacles in our lives, I am certain that as long as we have hope we will eventually make dreams come true. And, I could see a strong belief at Lydia’s Place that they will fight for any struggles and will achieve their dreams. I hope everyone keeps going and keeps searching for rainbow until we all find the rainbow at the end of clouds.

Brigit Cong

I was born in a family where I was protected from any potential hazard and any seamy side of the society; I think that’s the reason why I got so scared of what I saw during my first visit of Allegheny County Jail: people in white or orange uniforms walking around me, talking to me, seeming they are happy there. I said hello to them and talked to them, it was so wired and scaring that I have never imagined I could talk to “prisoners”!!!! From my imagination from movies and TV shows, they are all dangerous and do some very bad things and should wear handcuffs. What I didn’t know was there existed “prisoners” of various “levels”. That trip gave me so much shock. I saw chairs used for “calming down” people, bathrooms open to public places, young guys of my same age being incarcerated in a small cell, wearing big hats trying to hide faces, officers who are very kind to those incarcerated people and some other officers who are not so “kind”, wonderful female officer and desperate woman with big scaring “blank” eye staring at me, hands grabbing metal railings, small amount of food for one day and no sunshine there.

Later I knew most of those people live there because of drug issues. Since I got to know drugs, I learned that it is a very very risky thing, people who use it once, either initially or passively, will use it again and again, eventually getting addicted. Some will die, some will go to jail. I come from a common Chinese family; I’m so confused, since it’s not a “big deal” that young people try it, and then what is the boundary between in and out of jail? How many young people can just try it for fun and do not get addicted, finally going to jail?

Rachelle is grandmother of two sons, 16 grandchildren and great grandchildren. When I first met her, both of us were shy plus I am tired of doing school work using second language; I didn’t know how I should pick up some topics without hurting her. When we started to talk, it turned out that she is so kind to me. My four grandparents are all passed away when I was very young; the conversation with her made me feeling one of her grandkids. As a typical Chinese family, I’m the only child in my family. I admired so much at her big family. So I decided to make a family tree for her, in this way it can helped me to know more about her stories; I also want to show my respect to what she is trying to doing now.

Brigit Cong, *continued*

This is stories she told me:
She started to drink alcohol when she was 9 years old because her grandfather was a spirit sale person; she started to take drug at 15 years old because she thought it was cool; her mom was angry but still gave her money for buying drugs; her body started to feel tired because of taking drugs, so she tried to stop in at the age of 35, but failed; she tried several times, still didn't work; she got depressed, trying to kill herself; In 1999, her mom died, it was a big strike for her; when she turns to 51, she tries to rehabilitate again and never wanted to go back; she is happy about who she is now; now she lives in recovery house, and still take pills for depression.

I am so happy for her; I hope what we do in this class will help her at some level; I do wish her good luck in the future.

She also mentioned to me that her older son is in jail now because of selling drugs; he did it to support his family. It sounds sad to me as she mentioned he is a good father of 9 kids. He will get married on May 28th in the jail. One of his daughters gets depressed because of her father's sudden absence of home and tried to kill herself not long ago.

I am at a loss for words. What impact do parents have on their kids?

What if her grandparents watching more on her, forbidding her getting access to alcohol at such young age, would it possible for her life to be entirely different? What if her mom not conniving at her drug abuse, seeking for support instead of giving her money, would it possible for her to stop it earlier instead of trying so long? Would it be possible that her son having another job to support his family instead of selling drugs if he had a mom not taking drugs? How happy would his daughter be if she had her dad and mom being with her when she needed them instead of being depressed? Seems this litter girl blamed her grandmother for letting her dad foul up selling drugs and leaving her? I know there is no one to blame, those being loved are also ripped apart by the struggle.

I keep thinking about it, more thoughts come to my mind. Her grandparents and mom to her; she to her son; her son to his daughter; can society do something to stop this circle keep on going? Bad community, peer pressure, all those things need to be watched out by society. What can I do to help those people, or at least my partner, Rachelle? Did I help her from this support group project?

I can see how much effort she is making, this inspires me a lot. If I was her, maybe I wouldn't be better than her. It needs a lot of strength if anyone is in this situation. I hope this time is the last try for her. I learned so much from this project. It made me realize that the world is so much more complicated that something cannot be changed very fast, but we still need to keep trying until it works. Thanks my professor for giving me such precious opportunity of learning so much; thanks my partner Rachelle for telling me your painful stories and happy moment with families. Thanks everyone who giving me help on this project.

Samantha Simmons

This class was probably the most intimate class I've ever taken. The only class, in which I knew something personal about each of my classmates, and probably the only studio class I ever taken in which the work I produced was not intended to build upon my own portfolio. Instead the class was about applying the skills I already honed as well my own background experiences to help other people.

After completing the course, I think my work did help to make a difference. At the start of the term, we took a tour of the jail, and I remember the cold, hard, belittling stares I received as we passed by a group of women in the hall. But I didn't feel upset, rather I remembered thinking that if I were in their position and a group of students walked by, "observing" me in jail, I would probably give the same dark looks back. I felt wrong being there, like going to a zoo and looking at the animals in the cage.

The second time I went back, it was not on a tour, but instead it was for the Mother's Voice program in order to take pictures of the women to send to their children. And though at first I received some of the same cold stares, after they realized that I was there for them, their expressions and attitude completely shifted. I was suddenly referred to as hunny and sweetie and given compliments by the women.

The women got excited and ran off to fix up their hair and make-up for their individual photo shoots. I had fun when I was there. The women joked around with each other as they each got their pictures taken, and it turned out that some of the toughest looking women were actually the friendliest and most welcoming. I had a good time with women, but each time I left, I always had a strange feeling in my stomach and felt sad. I saw the nice, fun side of the women, and it was conflicting for me that they were kept behind bars. Why were they in jail if they were nice people? And how can one person or a system of people have the control to completely take the freedom away from another human being? I had to remind myself each time that I left that they were in jail for a reason, that they had committed crimes, and for some of them, going to jail was probably the best thing for them. But still it was hard for me to meet them, have a good time, get back in my car to go home, while the women just went back into their cells.

Overall, I think that my work was appreciated both in the process of taking the pictures and hopefully by the child when he or she receives picture of his or her mother. Most children think that their parents die when they go to jail because they don't understand the circumstances of the situation, so hopefully having a picture to remind them that their mothers are still alive and that they are beautiful women will help them get through the times that their mothers are apart from them.

Taylor Reynolds

Coming into this class, I didn't think I could really make a lasting difference in any of these women's lives. I didn't even know if I'd have the courage to ask them about their history. Fortunately, the women in our group at Lydia's Place were some of the most welcoming strangers I've ever met outside of school. I only spent a short time with them, but that time made me realize how much people can impact each other.

It's strange, but every time I walked into Lydia's Place, I felt nervous and shaky. I had no reason to feel this way; I just started to worry for no reason. However, after a few minutes of talking to my other classmates and the ladies at the start of each session, those nerves soon melted away. It constantly amazed me how comfortable everyone was around each other. Of course, there were a few awkward silences or someone would forget what they were trying to say, but these women filled the room with life and vitality. That's something I'll never forget.

Once, during a silent moment at Lydia's Place, the women were sitting in a circle, thinking about what they were going to do once they got back to Surrender House that night. One

Taylor Reynolds, *continued*

woman said she'd watch television, another said she might go straight to sleep. Soon, the conversation reached a much deeper level when someone said, "It's just a blessing to go to sleep and stay sober. To have a home, have a family." The women began discussing how they used to go out at 4AM, do whatever they chose, then go to sleep at a random hour, only to wake up and start the vicious cycle over again. Now that they're sober, they can live life more abundantly because they're awake during the day, able to hold steady jobs, and relax and enjoy life instead of running around when everyone else is asleep. Finally, one of the women stated, "courage is one of the program's gifts". After witnessing such a beautiful moment between women who've all been through more than I can imagine, I was nearly in tears.

Looking back on it, I don't think I've changed anyone's life forever. I doubt my company and small presents will keep any of the women from going back to jail or take away any hardships they'll face in their lives. There's so much coming at them from every direction and I realize that I'm not the most qualified person to try and help. Nonetheless, I'm 100 percent certain that I have made an impression in their lives, just like they have in mine. I sincerely hope that being able to open up to a few students who want nothing more than to learn a little about their lives will help the women open up to the people who matter most, like their families, counselors, and other women who are struggling through the same things. My photo album may not shield Mary from any struggles, but I hope it helps her to overcome her hindrances with the knowledge that her family and friends love her. In my description of my original plan for my project before meeting the women, I said that I wanted this project to be something that the mother and child can look back on and rediscover their emotions or memories, centering on how their relationship has changed and (hopefully) grown instead of unearthing harbored feelings or grudges. I now hope that this project will bring Mary and the other ladies of Surrender House together; I also hope she can show it to her 13 year old granddaughter and share a few fun memories to illustrate that she's on the right track.

Dan Lim

It's been a pleasure having an opportunity to spend time with the ladies at the Lydia's Place. I hope it was the same for them. Despite the time we had spent together was short, I have learned many things from them. They showed me what real courage is and how to remain hope in our lives.

After first two meetings, we were paired up for partners. My partner, Karen was very outgoing and friendly. We got along and spent many good times together.

Using photography had a big role to build connection. The ladies loved to be taken pictures and they anticipated the next week to see the printed pictures. Since I knew how much this printed sheet of pictures were important to Karen, I always tried to take extra picture of her. Once I had no battery on my camera and was not able to bring any new pictures, she was very upset.

Ironically, most of my exams this semester were held on Thursdays. Thus, I was so tired most of the times. And to be honest, I did not wanted to attend the support group sometimes and felt I'd rather take a nice rest at home. However, those thoughts always suddenly changed once I step into the building.

I was surprised by the writing skills of most of the ladies there. They express their thoughts and opinions very creatively and precisely through the poems and letters.

I am very glad I had a chance to meet every one of them at Lydia's Place. I wanted to tell them it is essential to never give up and keep remaining sober and beautiful.

The instructor’s reflections at the semester’s end

Charlee Brodsky

In this class we worked with women, who were also known as ‘female offenders,’ to see how and if photography could be a part of their recovery. Could our images and interactions with the women be a positive influence at this stage in their lives when they are striving to live ‘clean and sober’? And more theoretically, can photography be a tool to help direct lives towards positive outcomes?

Amanda, my 25 year-old partner told me, “I am a broken woman slowly piecing my life back together... I am a butterfly with a healing wing... I am just trying to figure it all out.”

I’ve been involved with photography for over thirty-five years as a teacher and a photographer. During this time I have become increasingly aware of how photography can work in people’s lives. Photography, historically, is a part of people’s lives. From its onset in the 19th century, and true now, photographing family members is the most popular use of the medium. Family snapshots are still ubiquitous, although now they exist more on computer screens than in black paper albums.

But many of the women that we worked with don’t have photographs of their past. Some grew up in foster homes where as children, they were not celebrated and cherished, as are fortunate children who grow up in stable families with adequate financial means.

At the end of our course we asked our women if our project was important to them. There was a resounding YES. A few told us that these photographs showed them who they are. Others expressed gratitude that we cared to listen to their stories.

At Lydia’s Place we met warm, loving women who were at a transitional point in their lives. They told us about the struggles in their lives and their determination to move forward. Most were no longer in jail, but they weren’t back to their families, yet. Most lived in a ¾ living arrangement where they were going to Lydia’s Place off-and-on during the week where they participated in programs that would help them learn how to keep clean and sober, and be more responsible to others, especially their families. Some were also going to school. Others were going to work.

The women loved the photographs that we made with them. These photographs reinforced positive feelings and preserved good memories — they are with their friends, and people who care about them, at Lydia’s Place, a safe (and great) place.

I believe that there are three audiences for this work.

The most immediate audience is *Our Women*. We documented Kim, Mary, Donna, Amanda, Melissa, Karen, Rachelle, and Creola—in images and words, for them. We hope that they remember this time we spent together positively. We certainly will.

The second audience for this work is *Other Women Offenders*. Those who are in-and-out of the penal system because they are struggling with addiction could learn from our women. We know that recovery is difficult and that addiction is not surmountable for all, but our work shows women rebuilding their lives. Our women are positive role-models.

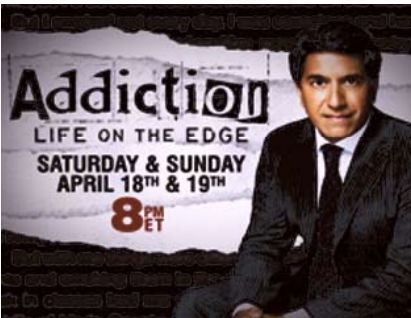
The third audience that I would like to reach with our work is the large group of *Others* who don’t know about incarcerated women. I asked myself over and over again throughout the semester, *Why should others, with no connection to these women, care about women in jail?* An obvious answer is that prison and jail populations continue to grow at alarming rates, and we, as taxpayers, are bearing the cost. Most women are incarcerated because of addiction. Wouldn’t our tax money be better spent understanding addiction and investing in treatment centers rather than jails?

But I think there’s a deeper reason why we should care about these women—a part of being human is caring for each other. My students took this class because they wanted to ‘do the right thing.’ Some wanted to work with children who are innocent victims when mothers go to jail; others wanted to learn about lives vastly different from their own; and some wanted to see if they could help people in need. This was a different kind of CMU class. We learned about life from directly working with our women, not from books.

The instructor’s reflections at the semester’s end, *continued*

Addiction:
what I did
(and didn’t learn)
from Sanjay Gupta

by Charlee Brodsky



98% of Lydia’s Place clients have addiction problems. The percentage of women in the Allegheny County Jail who are incarcerated because of crimes related to addiction is close to that number.

Early on in our class, we discussed inequities regarding people with addictions. One of my students remarked last year that she has friends with addictions that go to rehab, not jail.

Lauren, my student who is presently working with the Department of Human Services who shares my interest in this area, emailed me that the CNN program Addiction: Life on the Edge would air a few minutes. I tuned in. Dr. Sanjay Gupta, as the CNN statement read, follows ‘a mother, a writer, a student and a husband. Each an addict on a journey through recovery and relapse.’

The program made it clear that *relapse is a part of recovery*. An addict may relapse over and over again, three or even ten times, before becoming ‘clean and sober’ if the addict, in fact, does become drug and alcohol free.

The program highlighted that there were two important needs for recovery: **treatment** and **support**. Treatment might be multifold and include drug programs such as rehabilitation institutes which cost one person profiled in the story \$28,000 per month. These ‘rehab’ might use the 12 Step Program and/or talk therapies. Treatment might also include new and promising drug therapies that target areas of the brain where the addict’s cravings occur. Support was essential, too, and came through the individual’s community such as the immediate family.

What the program did not mention was the enormous population of prison and jail inmates that cannot afford the staggering price of rehab, do not have access to good medical treatment, and come from broken families. It’s likely that when a person with financial means and a caring family relapses, that individual goes back to rehab and is given a second, third, or fourth chance. When a former offender relapses, she’s back on the streets. She commits drug related crimes. She goes back to jail.

In an interview in the New York Times, Darryl Starwberry, a well-liked American baseball slugger, is questioned about ‘his former illegal drug use, complete with cocaine binges and time in jail.’ He responds, “I wasn’t a criminal. That’s what saddened me. Not being a criminal and going to jail because you have a substance-abuse problem is really sad. It’s sad that the system doesn’t see that as the real issue.”

As Nell Bernstein writes in All Alone in the World, her superb book on the effects of incarceration on inmates’ children, “Sending someone to jail for victimless crimes —for abusing themselves— doesn’t produce a solution.”

Should our jails be treatment centers? Do they work as treatment centers?

Are addicts criminals or do they have a disease?

A letter to Karen, from Dan

Karen did not come to the last two support groups and the staff at Lydia's Place had not heard from her. Dan, her partner, was concerned, as were all of us. Dan wrote this letter to Karen and read it at our final presentation. We gave the letter and Dan's gift to Karen to Lydia's Place in hopes that Karen would eventually receive it. We heard that Karen did stop by Lydia's Place a few weeks later and got her gift and letter. We learned that because Karen had not found work, she had to move to a less expensive apartment and could not make it to Lydia's Place because of the distance. We were glad to hear that she was doing okay.

Dear my partner, Karen,

It's been a pleasure having an opportunity to spend time with you at the Lydia's Place. I hope it was the same for you. Despite the time we had spent together was short, I have learned many things from you. You showed me what real courage is and how to remain hope in our lives.

After first two meetings, we were paired up for partners. I was glad my partner was you, very outgoing and friendly person who always brings enormous energy. We got along well and spent many good times together, especially in the front of the building, smoking.

I believe photography had a big role in building connection between us. You loved to be taken pictures after putting lipsticks. Although I was the worst photographer, you always smiled in front of camera and liked the pictures I took. I remember that one time when I had no battery on my camera and was not able to bring any new pictures, you seemed to be very upset. I have realized the meaning of pictures were not only for the appearance, but to show your present minds and expression.

I know you are going through many tough situations, particularly trying to look for jobs to afford rent. We may not be in contact, but I hope you are not in any trouble and I am certain that you will be making right choices for yourself and for your daughter and grand-daughter.

Remember the box in which we decided to put things that are important to you. You put pictures of your family, earrings, lipsticks, chiropractor's card, and bus card. I am hoping one day you come back and add the pictures we have taken together, for the special memories we had.

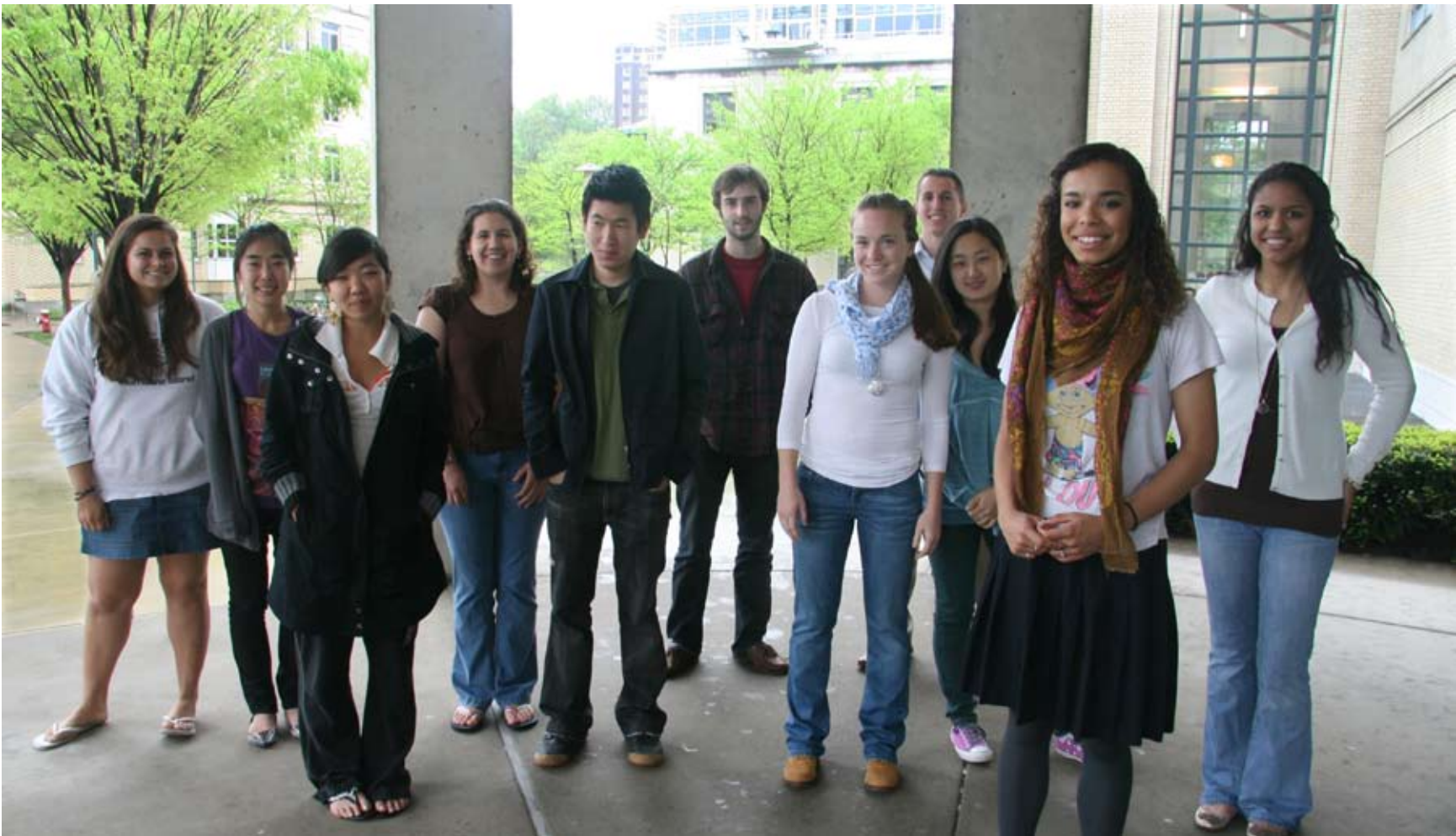
I am very glad I had a chance to meet you. I wanted to tell you it is essential to never give up and keep remaining sober and beautiful. We are all waiting to hear from you, hoping that you are well.

Best Regards,
Dan

Our photographs



Our photographs, *continued*



Lydia's Place women, top
Carnegie Mellon students, bottom

Our photographs, *continued*



Shoshana, left
Kim, right

Our photographs, *continued*



Shoshana, left
Kim, right

Our photographs, *continued*



Dan, left, grabbing a smoke with Rachelle, who is next to him. Shanely and Brigit from CMU hanging out with Kim, right, from Lydia's Place.

