



NEWSBULLETIN FOR OUTSIDE PENPALS -

PRISONER CORRESPONDENCE PROJECT

Montreal * January February March Issue

*** If you are receiving this news-bulletin, it's because you are (or have been in the past) involved in the Prisoner Correspondence Project, a Montreal-based collective that seeks to support LGBT folks and queers in prison. We do this primarily through coordination of a penpal program, and a resource library.

The aim of this bi-monthly newsbulletin is to increase dialogue and exchange between the core coordinating collective, and the people that comprise the project as non-incarcerated penpals. The aim is also to seek specific feedback, and keep folks up to date with project happenings. We are always seeking feedback, ideas, direction, etc, from penpals, both inside and outside of prison. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with questions, concerns, or ideas for the collective.

-- The supporting outside penpals committee of the Prisoner Correspondence

Project.

OUTSIDE PENPAL CHECK-IN

*** If you could take the time to send an email to queertrans.prisonersolidarity@gmail.com with short answers to the following questions, it would help us in better coordinating the project and in ensuring that all of our contacts on the inside have someone to correspond with.

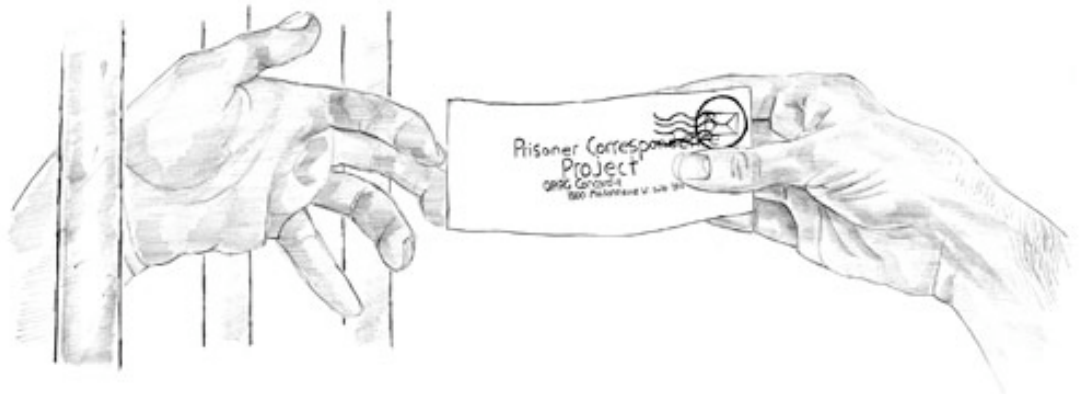
1. Are you still corresponding with your penpal?
2. If yes, if there anything you want to let us know about? (Change in their address or housing number, concerns you have, questions, etc)
3. If no, please let us know so we can check in with the person on the inside and pair them up with someone else. If you could let us know some of the reasons why it didn't work out, that would be helpful.
4. Do you want a second penpal (or be re-matched with someone if the first one didn't work out).

Thanks for your help. Your answers will be a huge help!

SOME RECENT HIGHLIGHTS & EVENTS

* SILENCE(still) = DEATH film screening - In December, members of the

Prisoner Correspondence Project, alongside members of Q-



Team and the

Ste-Emilie skillshare, coordinated a film screening of early queer shorts featuring early personal and political responses to the AIDS crisis. The event opened with members of each collective discussing the ways in which the histories of radical AIDS activism inform our work today; we also discussed the ways in which HIV/AIDS activism and prevention work, as well as the deepening criminalization of HIV+ communities intersect with struggles against prisons. The event was a huge success and we are planning a follow-up sometime this spring.

* In early February, the correspondence project headed down to Ottawa to coordinate a workshop with SNOWBLOWER, a sexual health and wellness festival for guys into guys. The workshop - "Fucking without Fear: Sexual 'Safety' Inside and Outside Prisons" featured statements from gay, queer and trans prisoners across the US and Canada on what sexual "safety" means when condom access is restricted or when queer sex is criminal. The discussion that followed explored the ways we can integrate HIV prevention work with work supporting trans folks and queer behind bars.

* In the coming months, we will be putting together a series of sexual health and safety pamphlets also called FUCKING WITHOUT FEAR that are specific to gay, queer, and trans experience in prison. The three pamphlets will focus on:

- safer barebacking and fucking without condoms for people in mens prisons
- safer fucking without dams or condoms for people in womens prisons
- navigating safety when you or your partner is HIV+

We hope that these pamphlets respond to the lack of information available about having safer sex without condoms, as well as confront the barriers our penpals have in accessing information about survival inside prisons.

* We just put out the first ever issue of our NEWSLETTER for inside folks. This newsletter was six pages and featured descriptions of prisoner support organizations, a crossword, drawings, a list of resources available in our library, and callouts for submissions to upcoming projects. We mailed it out to our 100+ inside penpals. The aim

of the (quarterly) newsletter is to create a venue for folks inside to provide us feedback and contribute to the day to day functioning of the project. Check it out on our website!

WAYS TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT

* **OUTREACH INSIDE PRISONS** - We are in the process of stepping up our outreach efforts into prisons across Canada. If you have any contacts with people or organizations that do work on the inside, and would be willing to put us in touch, that would be great. Contacts with people who work within prisons can also be useful in this regard.

* **FINDING NON-INCARCERATED PENPALS** - We are always trying to find new penpals on the outside to respond to our ongoing requests from folks inside prisons. If you are able to help out with any outreach among outside communities, this is an area we are always in need of help with. Outreach within gay, lesbian, transsexual / transgender, queer communities especially needed.

* **TRANSLATION** - We are always in need of translation and translators (English/French in particular), both for day to day admin / correspondence, as well as longer term translation of our resources for the resource library.

* **SPECIAL EVENTS** - We often need additional help when putting together special events. If you'd like, we can keep you posted about special projects and events, and let you know where you can plug in. (Note most of our events take place in Montreal).

* **RESOURCE LIBRARY** - We are in the process of trying to make our resource library more comprehensive and to fill in the existing gaps. If you have suggestions of things to add that would be specifically useful for folks inside, please let us know.

* If you have other ideas about how you or your organization could support the Prisoner Correspondence Project, don't hesitate to be in touch.

WAYS THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO SUPPORT OUTSIDE PENPALS

* EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES - Upon getting involved, we provide all outside penpals with a list of expectations and guidelines that provide some context for the project and goes over some things to consider. This document is periodically workshopped and updated, both within the collective, as well as among folks inside and other people directly affected by incarceration. As such, we will periodically send you an updated version of this.

* RESOURCE LIBRARY - The main way we seek to support outside penpals in turn support their inside penpal, is by coordinating a resource library of information and writing about survival inside of prisons. This includes info on safer sex, safer fixing / hormone injection, clean needle care, safer tattooing, emotional self-care, negotiating coming out, general literature about queer and trans experience in prison, etc. For those who live in Montreal, the library is open for public access at QPIRG (info provided below). For those who live outside of Montreal, we are working on making the bulk of these resources available on our website, for remote access, downloadable as pdf files.

* MAILBOX - If you would prefer to receive your letters at QPIRG as opposed to at your personal address, we can let you know once we receive a letter from your penpal and you can come by and pick up the letter, or if you live outside of Montreal, mail it to you. (Note that this means sometimes considerable delays).

* STAMPS - We can cover the cost of the letters / stamps you send. Get in touch with us for more details. Until further notice this is only available for outside penpals who live within Canada.

* BOOKS - We also have a working relationship with Open Door Books, a books-to-prisoners chapter out of QPIRG. We are free to take any of the books from their collection to send to our penpals. All their books are in the boardroom at QPIRG and we can help ourselves. (Please familiarize

yourself with mailroom policies and restrictions, or get in touch with us for more details.) If you live outside of Montreal, you can get in touch with us with a general topic request, and we can send it to your penpal directly.

* LISTSERV - We have a listserv / google group that functions as a venue for people to send out questions, concerns, ideas, anxieties, etc, to other penpals involved with this project. It is very low traffic. Once you are subscribed, you can send messages to: queertrans_prisonersolidarity@googlegroups.com, and it will go out over the list.

* SUPPORTING OUTSIDE PENPALS COMMITTEE - We have struck a small committee who checks in periodically with outside penpals to see if there are other ways we can be supporting them, and to also function as a venue for outside penpals to bring up specific concerns in a more direct (or private) way. Don't hesitate to get in touch with the committee at this email address.

*** If you no longer want to receive these updates, or are not involved in the Prisoner Correspondence Project, please reply with an email that say 'unsubscribe'.